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FEAR OF FAILURE:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DIVISION III STUDENT-ATHLETES

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate Program in Exercise and Sport Sciences
Ithaca College

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Science

By

Cristen Robin Halladay

September 2003

Ithaca College
Graduate Program in Exercise and Sport Sciences
Ithaca, New York

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS

This is to certify that the Master of Science Thesis of

Cristen Robin Halladay

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Exercise and
Sport Sciences at Ithaca College has been approved.

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August 22, 2003

ABSTRACT

The following research question was examined: What perceptions impact perceived fear of failure? Division III basketball athletes were assessed for fear of failure (FOF) using the Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT) and a short open-ended questionnaire that was comprised of five questions about different sport performance situations. Following the initial SCAT testing and questionnaire, four subjects ($n = 2$ males, $n = 2$ females) with the highest perceived fear of failure scores were purposefully selected. The subjects were then given an in-depth, semi-structured interview pertaining to how they perceived themselves in different sport situations. Each subject's coach was also interviewed in an attempt to triangulate the athlete's responses. In addition, the primary researcher observed several practice sessions and competitions while keeping a written journal of conversations and behaviors. Data was transcribed and inferences were drawn to illustrate these athletes' perceived fear of failure and to examine perceptions impacting perceived fear of failure. The following four themes emerged to provide an answer to the research question:

1. Expectations from their coaches and the athletes' families caused the athletes to feel tremendous pressure.
2. Athletes stated that getting compliments and pleasing coaches, family, and self was very important.
3. Athletes attributed their successes and/or failures to external factors, such as luck, injury, circumstance, or they blamed others for their own failures.
4. All athletes suffered from low self confidence, self-esteem, and/or perfectionism.

A discussion of these findings, as they relate to the existing literature, is provided. Recommendations for future research on the topic of fear of failure are also discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people, without whom the completion of this thesis would not have been possible.

Dr. Greg A. Shelley for his patience, understanding, and guidance throughout this thesis.

Shane Halladay, my husband who was a constant source of motivation and support for me to finish this project. Without him NOTHING would be possible.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to both my husband Shane and my son Jackson (the loves of my life), without their love and support I would not be the person I am today.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every year millions of athletes experience what they perceive as failure. The nature of competition, with clear-cut winners and losers, often sets athletes up for failure. Still, many athletes have a hard time coping with failure. Fear of failure occurs when one's level of aspiration exceeds his or her present level of ability, which results in efforts that seem inadequate (Wood, 1983). Fear of failure exerts such a powerful influence that unless appropriate action is taken, a person will suffer from a terrible feeling of impending failure (Wood). Fear of failure is often a result of faulty perceptions, which may stem from or have been molded by an individual's views of winning and losing, and expressions like, "winning is everything." The athlete who tries to shut out failure is shutting out the realities of life in general, and sport in particular.

It could be argued that how athletes deal with or learn from their failures is what makes them stronger and more successful. Winning and losing is a part of athletics. How winning or losing is dealt with may well determine whether or not an athlete develops a fear of failure. If fear of failure exists in an athlete's life, the chances of ever learning from failure or success are minimal (Muller, 1977). When an athlete succumbs to fear of failure, he or she gives up accepting the challenge to improve. As a result, learning will not likely take place because the athlete will not want to challenge him or herself to overcome the fear of failure (Maury, 1982).

An athlete with a fear of failure will most likely have low self-confidence and unhealthy attributional tendencies (Birney, Burdick, & Teevan, 1969). For example, this athlete may attribute his or her success internally to either effort or ability to help him or

herself feel better. An athlete will likely do this in an attempt to enhance his or her self-image, that is, to look good in the eyes of others. If this same athlete fails, he or she will likely attribute their failure externally to luck or task difficulty (Rejeski & Lowe, 1980). In this case, the athlete will attribute his or her failure externally to serve as a self-protecting mechanism. This protects the ego of the athlete in that he or she had little or no control over the circumstances and outcome.

Fear of failure has also been shown to lead athletes on a cohesive team to create self-protecting biases or self-handicapping strategies (Mark, Mutrie, Brooks, & Harris, 1984). Self-protecting biases serve an athlete with a fear of failure by allowing that athlete to blame the causes of his or her failure on external factors beyond his or her control. This self-handicapping strategy allows the athlete to create an excuse for his or her failure. Common problems used to excuse poor or disappointing performances by athletes with a fear of failure include illness and an assortment of impending ailments and injuries (Bukowski & Moore, 1980). For example, an athlete might state, "I did not perform well today because I have the flu."

Low self-confidence has also been an attributing factor to fear of failure (Lirgg & Feltz, 1989). If an athlete has or develops a high self-confidence, he or she may not feel the need to use self-handicapping strategies to cover up for any perceived inadequacies. If an athlete has low self-confidence, it will likely add to his or her fear of failure. Success enhances self-confidence. Failure generally decreases self-confidence, leaving the athlete with a fear of failure that may be compounded with unhealthy attributional tendencies and a low self-confidence (Lirgg & Feltz). Because fear of failure is generally a negative experience, most athletes will go to great lengths to avoid failing. Those who

fear failure will often refuse to take on a new or existing challenge. If a less demanding task is not available to this athlete, he or she will likely become discouraged and will more often quit rather than risking future failure (Wood, 1983).

In order to more fully understand fear of failure and what impacts an athlete's fear, greater attention must be given to individual experiences of student-athletes experiencing fear of failure. With many athletes attempting to cope with fear of failure and the varied emotional responses that accompany fear of failure, it is critical that fear of failure be further delineated.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore fear of failure as perceived by male and female Division III, student-athletes. This study provided an in-depth description of the fear of failure experience as perceived by selected Division III men and women collegiate athletes. Potential sources of fear and the perceptions that lead to fear of failure were examined.

Statement of the Problem

There is little research on the concept of fear of failure. Attributions and self-confidence have been shown to impact fear of failure, yet it is still unclear, "what makes athletes fear failure?" (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1982). The research from the 1960's and 1970's has suggested that females fear success rather than failure (Birney et al., 1969). Women may possess a fear of success because they do not want men to think that they are "manly" for achieving in sport (Birney et al.). In more recent studies, females more than males, have been shown to attribute their success to luck rather than

ability, and to rate their ability lower (Greenberg et al.). More research, however, is needed to clarify these attributions and perceptions.

While it is true that the general feelings, emotions, and anxieties in sport have been well researched, there has been little research on the concept of fear of failure. Further, qualitative methodologies have not been used in the study of fear of failure. This study utilized a qualitative methodology to aid in a more descriptive understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes associated with fear of failure. The specific aim of this research was to gather in-depth qualitative data related to each athlete's unique experiences, interpretations, and descriptions of their fear of failure.

Benefits

This study explored fear of failure in Division III collegiate student-athletes. The benefit of such a study is that the "experience" of fear of failure is more closely examined. The primary researcher, through qualitative interviews, was able to assess the actions, thoughts, and feelings of the athletes experiencing fear of failure. The study was designed to probe beyond the existing research and explore the feelings, perceptions, and experiences of athletes that fear failure. With a greater insight into the perspectives and perceptions of these athletes comes a greater understanding of how and why fear of failure exists. With a greater understanding of fear of failure, a more comprehensive and holistic approach to helping athletes cope with and overcome fear of failure is possible.

Research Question

This study was designed to explore the following question: What perceptions impact perceived fear of failure?

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted on the Ithaca College campus. All questionnaires and interviews were administered in the women's basketball team room. Data were collected between January 2, 1997, and March 1, 1997. Subjects consisted of female and male, Ithaca College basketball athletes. Subjects were 18-26 years of age.

Delimitations

1. This study was delimited to the participants that answered the questionnaires and were interviewed.
2. This study was delimited to the Division III men's and women's basketball teams at Ithaca College.
3. This study was delimited to the athletes that obtained a high score on the SCAT (i.e., a score of 21 or higher; see SCAT explanation on p. 32).
4. This sample was delimited to a small sample ($n = 4$) of college-athletes.

Limitations

1. The results are limited to the truthfulness of the participants' answers obtained on the questionnaires and from the interviews.
2. The results are not generalizable to any individual or group outside of Division III men's and women's basketball.
3. Subjects included only male and female basketball athletes experiencing fear of failure.
4. Results are limited to a small and purposive sample.

Definition of Terms

1. Fear of failure occurs when someone's level of aspiration exceeds their present ability, resulting in efforts that seem inadequate (Wood, 1983). Fear of failure exerts such a powerful influence that unless appropriate action is taken, this person will suffer from a terrible feeling of impending failure (Wood). Fear of failure causes athletes to feel that if, for example, they should strike out, drop a fly ball, or miss a free throw, they would perceive themselves to be failures and as letting their team or self down.

2. Low self-confidence, low self-esteem, and low self-consciousness are defined as a fear of negative evaluation or criticism in a social situation (Albury, 1980).

3. Anxiety is an abnormal apprehension often accompanied by physiological signs (e.g., sweating and an increased pulse), doubt about the nature and reality of the perceived threat itself, and self-doubt (Albury, 1980).

4. Fear is an unpleasant, often strong awareness of danger or an anxious concern (Martens, 1982).

5. Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that allows the researcher to describe how people describe and experience things through their senses (Husserl, 1962).

6. A study auditor is one who reads the raw data and the inferences made from that data to determine if accurate assumptions have been drawn. The study auditor also oversees the project (Denzin, 1994).

7. A peer debriefer is a person who reads the raw data and explores the investigator's biases in interpreting, managing, and reporting the data (Locke, 1989). The peer debriefer challenges the primary researcher's reasons and logic, the analytical process, and the decisions (inferences) that are made (Shelley, 1998).

8. Bracketing is when a researcher leaves behind what he or she already knows about the experiences under investigation. It is an attempt to put aside all preconceptions and confront the subject matter as much as possible on its own terms (Patton, 1990).

9. Intuiting is giving complete attention or focus to the experience being studied (Burns & Grove, 1987).

10. Triangulation is the use of many methods of data collection to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Triangulation is a way to add rigor to a study by combining the data from multiple interviews, questionnaires, and observations (Shelley, 1998).

11. Rigor is the degree to which the primary researcher deals with discipline, in adhering to and identifying the problem, designing the research, and analyzing the data. It requires the researcher to be objective, and committed to the established rules for conducting qualitative inquiry (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

12. Interview Guide is defined as a set of questions written by the interviewer to ask during an interview, to aid in answering the overall research question (Shelley, 1998).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Given the increasing importance placed on sport and competition in today's society, athletes have continued to experience failure at a high rate. Athletes start competing at very young ages and the idea of just "playing" a sport likely exists less and less. Many children play to compete and to "win" (Elliot & Church, 1997). Thus, if an athlete loses he or she may experience failure and a feeling of not meeting expectations (Elliot & Church). For any athlete, there is an increasing probability of experiencing a fear of failure if that athlete has a low self-confidence and attributes his or her failures externally (Passer, 1983). While most athletes have the psychological tools necessary to deal with failure, some do not. For many athletes, failure results in decreasing self-confidence (Passer). As a season progresses and an athlete continues to fail, he or she may start to externally attribute that failure in order to protect any remaining self-confidence (Lirgg & Feltz, 1989).

The first part of this chapter examines possible predisposing factors related to the onset of fear of failure. Low self-confidence, low self-esteem, low self-consciousness, and attributional tendencies aid in the development of and progression toward fear of failure. Each of these factors is discussed in relation to fear of failure. The second part of this chapter discusses past research on fear of failure, and how fear of failure is most often measured.

Low Self-Confidence, Low Self-Esteem, and Low Self-Consciousness

The relationship between self-confidence, fear of failure, and sport performance has received limited attention in sport research (Albury, 1980; Lirgg & Feltz, 1989;

Passer, 1983). As a result, more research is needed in order to better understand fear of failure in sport.

Self-confidence represents the way an athlete feels about his or her ability to be successful in sport (Passer, 1983). Athletes with low self-confidence are often those who inhibit their performance capabilities by introducing self-doubt and negative self-talk (Passer). Relating self-confidence and fear of failure, Albury (1980) used the Self-Deprecation and Insecurity Scale to measure fear of failure in male and female college students participating in a coeducational racket sport class. The subjects were administered the test after competing against one another for four weeks. The results indicated that low self-confidence, feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating due to an overwhelming sense of self-consciousness, may all be antecedents to developing a fear of failure or fear of not living up to one's standards (Albury).

Self-consciousness is defined as a fear of a negative evaluation by others or by oneself in a social situation, and is related to a fear of not living up to the expectations of others or oneself (Paivio, 1965). The inability to meet these expectations can be construed as failure, and therefore self-consciousness can be viewed as a fear of failure. What causes an individual to develop such a sense of self-consciousness? The answer to this question is dependent upon the person, as well as the social context that person finds him or herself. For example, family, school, and peer groups may impact self-consciousness and fear of failure. Likewise, Paivio suggested that self-conscious individuals usually came from families where parents had low standards, evaluated their

children unfavorably, punished the children frequently for failure, and rarely rewarded the children for success.

Schools also have a great impact on a self-conscious child (Varma, 1993). A highly self-conscious or anxious child is often lacking in self-confidence. This same student also tends to be low in curiosity and adventurousness and may therefore try to escape the anxiety-provoking situation by daydreaming in class (Varma). Therefore, classmates have a hard time associating with them and often react negatively. Teachers react similarly by classifying them as lacking the skills to adjust and possessing many other undesirable characteristics (Varma). This may help to explain why a high self-conscious or anxious child performs poorly academically and socially.

Another aspect that has a significant effect on an individual's self-consciousness or self-esteem is the role of the peer group (Varma, 1993). In mid-adolescence, loyalty to the peer group supersedes everything else, including family and school standards and expectations (Varma). The fear that an individual may have of being ostracized from his or her peer group may exceed all other anxieties experienced and may lead to a behavior that is in opposition to any family or school standards. In the worst cases the individual is ostracized and is bullied by his or her peer group, whereby they may feel such an overwhelming sense of anxiety and low self-esteem and self-consciousness that he or she may begin to contemplate suicide (Varma). In fact, during adolescence, the greatest fear of failure stems from being ostracized by a peer group (Varma). The peer group offers an identity to the adolescent. Without the peer group, the adolescent becomes overwhelmingly self-conscious and self-worth is diminished (Varma).

Lirgg and Feltz (1989) indicated that self-confidence in physically active females was lower than the self-confidence of physically active males. These authors explained that males had a higher sense of perceived ability than did females. The female stereotype states, "if women succeed in athletics more than males they would be seen as strange or manly" (Lirgg & Feltz, p. 276). The male stereotype states, "if a male fails in athletics he is not much of a man." (Lirgg & Feltz, p. 276). The feminine sex role stereotype underestimates females and their abilities in a physical activity setting by establishing a fear in women to achieve. As a result, this stereotype causes females to develop a fear of success. According to Lirgg and Feltz, females became afraid to achieve anything that may have seemed inappropriate for their gender, especially in sport. For example, women were afraid when they had greater sport success than males, males and other females may think they were "strange" or "manly" (Lirgg & Feltz).

In another study, Passer (1983) indicated males to have a higher fear of failure than fear of success. Fear of failure was more prominent in males, because when a male fails he is often viewed as less of a man. Concerning female athletes, Lirgg and Feltz (1989) stated that, greater female participation in sport and physical activity might help to counter fear of success in women and may even turn the female athlete toward a fear of failure complex.

Attributions

The attribution theory attempts to explain how people understand and predict events based upon their perceptions of them (Frieze, 1976). Individuals develop tendencies to explain their own actions in terms of how they perceive specific situations. Winning and losing in competitive sport situations often influences athletes to stop and

ask, "What can I attribute my performance to?" (Frieze; Rejeski & Lowe, 1980; Tenenbaum, Furst, & Weingarten, 1984).

Frieze (1976) investigated the cause of people's successes and failures. People generally attribute or categorize specific outcomes based on ability, luck, effort, or task difficulty. Frieze administered a questionnaire to 51 male and female non-athletic college students that contained four to eight success and failure outcome stimuli statements. For example, a student would receive an outcome stimuli of a failing grade. The subject was then asked to state why he or she thought each outcome occurred. Specifically what caused the perceived failure or success in the written outcome statements? Results indicated that effort and ability attributions were the most commonly used attributions to explain successes. Luck and task difficulty were the most widely used words to explain failure. In short, success was due to controllable factors. Failure was due to uncontrollable factors. Also, subjects were more concerned about the specific causes of failure than the causes of success, especially when the subjects admitted to having a fear of failure (Frieze).

Attributions are determining factors of fear of failure (Frieze, 1976). The perceived cause of failure (e.g., ability, effort, or lack of both) contributes to whether or not an athlete develops a fear of failure (Frieze). In sum, an athlete will try to protect his or her self-confidence through attributions.

Fear of failure is a direct cause of emotions. These emotions develop based on an outcome. Then the fear is attributed to that outcome. There are two types of achievement-related emotions that have been studied concerning sport performance. First, outcome-dependent emotions are defined as positive or negative reactions that are intensely

experienced following success or failure, regardless of the perceived cause of the outcome (Frieze, 1976). Second, attribution-dependent emotions are defined as a specific cause of the attribution made. For example, if failure equals effort, lack of effort will equal feelings of guilt. If failure equals ability, lack of ability will equal incompetence (Frieze). Rejeski and Lowe (1980) assessed the role of ability and effort in attributions of sport achievement. Male subjects were tested on a bicycle ergometer. Subjects were then asked to attribute the cause of their perceived success or failure to ability, effort, task difficulty, and/or luck. Results indicated that the successful outcomes were attributed to ability and effort, whereas unsuccessful outcomes were attributed to task difficulty and lack of ability, but not personal effort (Rejeski & Lowe). It is likely that individuals assume more personal responsibility for success than failure (Weiner, 1979). Specifically, people are more likely to attribute success to internal causes such as ability and effort. Failure, on the other hand, is more likely to be attributed to external factors such as task difficulty and luck.

Taylor and Doria (1981) chose collegiate level male and female hockey, basketball, and volleyball players to participate in their study. Each participant completed a pre and post-game questionnaire designed to measure causal attributions for individual and team success or failure. Results indicated that athletes were afraid to admit failure. These athletes were so terrified of being labeled by others that they placed blame on external factors. However, a self-serving bias sometimes became suppressed as a group serving bias emerged in order for the athlete to protect the team from failure (Taylor & Doria). As a result, athletes sometimes took personal responsibility for group failures. In this case, group failures were easier for the athletes to accept because there was not a

great of a risk for being singled out as the cause of the failure. In this study, team sports allowed fear of failure athletes to be within the group and accept failure, but still not be the sole reason for failure (Taylor & Doria). In summary, Taylor and Doria found athletes developing self-serving and group serving biases to avoid accepting responsibility for failure. Self-serving biases occur when an individual takes credit for good outcomes and denies responsibility for bad outcomes, in order to protect his or her self-confidence. Group serving biases occur when an individual accepts personal failure to protect the good of the group (Taylor & Doria). Several other authors have found that to avoid personal failure, individuals will blame other group members or attribute failure to external, uncontrollable factors rather than accepting personal failure (Forsyth & Schlenker, 1977; Gill, 1980; Wery, 1979).

It seems as though self-serving biases allow individuals with a perceived fear of failure to "save face". Similarly, attributions allow individuals an outlet to blame failure on external causes, meaning they perceive failure through no fault of their own (Gill, 1980).

McAuley, Russell, and Gross (1983) conducted a study utilizing 62 male and female physical education students. The subjects participated in competitive team table tennis matches against players of the same gender and ability. Causal attributions for table tennis performances were measured using the Causal Dimension Scale (Weiner, 1979), which allowed each subject to make a response or causal attribution for his or her outcome. Attributions were assessed along three causal dimensions; locus of causality, stability, and controllability. Subjects clearly learned reinforcements to be contingent upon performance. Subjects that were rewarded for a successful performance and

punished for an unsuccessful performance internalized the reinforcements and were guided by these reinforcements throughout their matches. If the subjects were successful on a cohesive team unit, they attributed their success to their own skills and/or the team's skills, yet continued to place an emphasis on their own personal skills.

Attributing success to personal skills often enhances self-confidence (McAuley et al., 1983). This likely happens because athletes remember that they were rewarded when they were last successful. If their team lost, the athlete that maintained a fear from past punishment or failure would have likely developed a self-handicapping strategy or a self-serving bias (McAuley et al.). In this same study, a self-handicapping strategy emerged when athletes felt they had let their team down. For example, if a basketball player missed the winning shot, he or she might say, "Well I twisted my ankle in warm-ups and I probably should not have been playing in the first place." Clearly, athletes developed excuses for why they did not perform well. In this study, the handicap allowed the athletes to relieve the pressure of always having to succeed. This protected the athletes' self-confidence and protected them against failure. When athletes have a fear of failure, they will do anything to avoid being seen by others as a failure (McAuley et al.).

In other research, Greenburg et al. (1982) studied 56 male undergraduate students that participated in a research study for partial fulfillment of an introductory psychology course. These students were divided into a control group and an experimental group and were all given a 20 item multiple-choice test. The control group did not have their test scores recorded nor were they required to put their names on their test. On the other hand, the experimental group members were asked to put their names on the test. Upon completion, the test was collected and scored by the experimenter. The subjects were

then asked to indicate on a 9-point scale (1 = not at all, 9 = extremely) the extent to which ability, the amount of effort they put into taking the test, the ease or difficulty of the test, and luck were responsible for their performances. Subjects were also asked how difficult, fair, and valid they perceived the test to be and how clear the instructions were. Greenburg et al. found the motive to protect one's self-image to be so strong that most students with a fear of failure created a self-serving bias to compensate for unsuccessful outcomes. Most students believed that if seen failing they would become failures in the public eye. Distorted perceptions of causality may have decreased the students' future achievement outcome and social relationships. As a result, causal attributions may have confounded the true cause of past failures (Greenburg et al.).

The role of ability and effort as attributions in sport achievement has been a determining factor for excusable and non-excusable outcomes (Forsyth & Schlenker, 1977). Failure seems excusable when athletes try hard, yet, when athletes do not try hard, a self-protecting bias occurs (Forsyth & Schlenker). Essentially, when athletes do not try they do not fail, because they are not trying. In summary, self-serving biases are likely utilized so that athletes can protect or increase their public esteem, along with their own personal self-confidence, which seems contingent upon their public esteem (Rejeski & Lowe, 1980).

Fear of Failure

Self-consciousness has been defined in this paper as a fear of negative evaluation or criticism in a social situation. Self-consciousness has also been related to the fear of not living up to standards and expectations held by others, and by oneself. The inability to meet these standards or expectations, for many performers, results in feelings of

perceived failure. To protect self-confidence/esteem many athletes will try to avoid failure, thus becoming self-conscious and possibly obtaining a fear of failure (Horowitz, 1982). Failure is often a defeat in the eyes of others, as well as a loss of self-esteem. The more ego-involved an individual is in his or her sport, the more bitter the loss will likely be (Horowitz).

“Why do highly motivated athletes who train hard and obviously want to do well contribute to their own self-destruction ...?” (Gauvrons, 1985, p. 16). One answer to this question is fear of failure. Fear of failure is often considered a motivation that is activated in achievement situations that allows a person to avoid failure instead of reaching for success (Birney et al., 1969). Unless a person is positive that success can be obtained, he or she will likely adopt some avoidance or defensive strategies (i.e., attributional tendencies) toward specific situations (Birney et al.). Corbin (1970) outlined two different types of fear of failure. The first type is the introverted fear of failure, in which individuals would be expected to fear devaluation of self-confidence or esteem. The second type is extroverted fear of failure in which individuals would be expected to fear social devaluation. Social devaluation would include perceived negative evaluations from others or non-attainment of prescribed standards. Devaluation of self-confidence would include not living up to personal goals or your “ideal self”.

Birney et al. (1969) suggested that as fear of nonattainment of certain standards approaches, negative consequences may occur. Nonattainment of a standard itself should not lead to a fear of failure. Failure or success should give an individual information about his or her skill level and allow them to learn from their mistakes. However, if punishment should occur as a result from nonattainment of a standard, an individual may

perceive that future failure/punishment is unavoidable and that he or she should engage in failure avoidant behaviors. The fear of failure individual may be trying to avoid the experience of failure and may use defensive strategies to avoid aversive consequences of nonattainment (i.e., attribution of failure to external factors, such as weather or illness).

Birney and colleagues (1969) further stated that it could be the secondary punishment that the fear of failure individual fears. These secondary punishing characteristics may include any or all of the following: (a) devaluation of self-esteem, lowered self-confidence; (b) receipt of a non-ego punishment, physical punishment, or; (c) social devaluation, negative evaluations from others (Birney et al.). As a result of nonattainment, it is very likely that individuals develop fears of devaluation of self-esteem, non-ego punishment, and/or social devaluation. Individuals differ in their degree of developing these fears based on their past experiences. It is also important that the specific type of fear that is being experienced be identified (e.g., fear of looking bad in front of others, fear of being punished by others, or fear of letting yourself down).

An individual with a fear of failure could also fear both achievement and social situations (Birney et al., 1969). Both situations may be perceived in a way that potentially leads to a negative evaluation. In both situations, an individual with fear of failure demonstrates failure avoidant tendencies to others' negative evaluations.

Atkinson and Feather's (1966) model of fear of failure assumes that, "fear of failure involves the anticipation of fear of failure combined with the motive to avoid failure" (p.136). The fear of not obtaining success can be so strong that a person with a fear of failure may avoid the task entirely to avoid personal shame and public humiliation (Atkinson & Feather). For example, a person will not try a new task if there is a risk of

failure, instead they will just avoid the situation all together. Birney et al. (1969) suggested for failure to have personal meaning to an individual, that the person must have or have taken a vested interest or responsibility for the failure. This way the person not only expects failure but also assumes the responsibility for failing. As a result, fear of failure can cause the individual to lose value in other peoples' eyes, and therefore develop a reason not to lose. In the end, the individual doesn't want to experience shame.

Duda and Gano-Overway (1996) studied the effects of anxiety and fear of failure in 75 female elite gymnasts. Members of the gymnastics National team were administered a multi-section questionnaire at a National gymnast training camp. The inventory consisted of a number of questions about perceived stress. For example, "In your gymnastics, what do you find most stressful?" Results revealed that for these gymnasts, sources of stress fit into eight broad categories: (a) performance of skill, (b) fear of evaluation, (c) aspects of competition, (d) fear of making mistakes, (e) expectations from self and others, (f) time pressures, (g) environmental conditions, and (h) fear of injury. In this study, all eight categories were related to fear of failure. The primary sources of stress among the members of the National team were performing the necessary skills properly, fear of evaluation, and the experience of competition (i.e., fear of failure). Based on these results, the authors indicated a strong need to enhance young gymnast's self-confidence in regard to skill execution, as well as, a need to eliminate potential fears (Duda & Gan-Overway). As stated, this relates to extroverted fear of failure as outlined by Corbin (1970).

Thompson (1997) studied external attributions for success and avoidance of failure in undergraduate students. In this study, failure-avoidant students were those who

stroved to avoid the negative implications of failure in terms of damage to their self-esteem. The participants were identified as failure-avoidant (possessing a fear of failure) through an experimental manipulation of different failure provoking situations which assessed their performance following failure and in response to a face saving excuse (Thompson). Students whose performance decreased after failure but whose performance improved when given a face-saving excuse constituted the failure-avoidant group. Results indicated that the failure-avoidant students attributed good outcomes to external causes more than any other group. In fact, the failure-avoidant group also had a tendency to not see good outcomes as a product of their own behaviors. Success was attributed to external factors rather than to the self. This might be partially explained by the students not having to live up to high expectations. The author stated that if success is externally attributed then failure must also be externally attributed and therefore not perceived as the individual's fault (Thompson).

Elliot and Church (1997) also studied avoidance of achievement motivations. These authors defined a negative performance-oriented goal as one that would most likely cause a negative response in achievement settings (e.g., a preference for easy or difficult tasks, withdrawal of effort in the face of failure, or decrease in task enjoyment). Mastery goals, on the other hand, were defined by a mastery motivational pattern (e.g., a preference for moderately challenging tasks, persistence in the face of failure, and enhanced task enjoyment).

According to the Need Achievement Theory, individuals are either oriented towards the attainment of success or the avoidance of failure (Elliot & Church, 1997). In their study, Elliot and Church assessed undergraduate students enrolled in a personality

psychology course for extra credit. The participants were assessed for achievement motivation, fear of failure, competence expectancies, achievement goals, competence perceptions, and intrinsic motivations. The students were asked a series of questions about how they felt the class was going and how well they were doing. Achievement motivation and fear of failure were measured during the first session. Competence expectancies were assessed in the second session and after all multiple-choice test taking. Fear of failure was measured using Herman's (1990) 27-item fear of failure measure. This scale represents and assesses the various components of fear of failure. These authors stated that fear of failure scores have been linked to threat appraisal, reported anxiety, task distraction, negative outcome focus, and various self-protective attributional propensities (Elliot & Church). Results indicated that mastery goals were those that focused on the attainment of competence and task mastery, whereas, achievement motivation was oriented toward the possibility of success. On the other hand, performance-avoidance goals focused on the avoidance of negative outcomes, while fear of failure was oriented toward the possibility of failure. In conclusion, if achievement situations present a threat or the possibility of failure, then fear of failure and performance is activated through avoidance in order to avoid failure. Elliot and Church suggested that future studies should focus on ways to reduce fear of failure so that individuals do not adopt performance avoidance goal orientations (i.e., eliminating fear of failure so that it does not have a direct effect on the individual's motivation).

Reducing the fear of failure has been a topic of many studies (Birney et al., 1969; Elliot & Church, 1997; Hosek & Man, 1984; Martens, 1982). Hosek and Man experimented with reducing anxiety and fear of failure in 56 swimming athletes. These

authors stated that increasing pressure to achieving in sport brings about an increase in anxiety and a fear of failure. As a result, there are likely two different motive components involved with fear of failure (Hosek & Man). The first fear of failure component describes a self-concept based on low perceived ability and worrying about the correctness of one's performance. The second component describes an emotional component of fear of failure and its social consequence (Hosek & Man). These motive components may lead one to believe that applied motivation training will lead to an increase in fear of failure and the fear of social consequences of failure. For example, the more time and energy invested in motivating the subjects to win, the higher the hope for success which often directly increases the fear that one may fail.

In Hosek and Man's (1984) study, swimmers possessed a fear of failure based on Schmalt's Achievement Motivation Grid (see Schmalt, 1999) and Marten's Sport Competitive Anxiety Test (SCAT: Martens, 1982). Subjects were divided into a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group was put through a motivational training program. The goal of the motivational training program was to train the swimmers to attribute their failure to ability (i.e., admit failure). These swimmers were asked to concentrate on task-oriented achievement behaviors rather than outcome. The control group participated in regular practice sessions but did not take part in the motivational training. The authors hoped that by placing emphasis on the action (i.e., achievement behavior) that pressure or worry would decrease. The results indicated that the experimental group had an increase in motivation parameters (i.e., their hope for success and their motivation to complete the task increased and replaced the debilitating fear of failure that once held them back). However, this increase was only for a short

period of time. When tested at a later time, the effects (i.e., their hope for success) decreased.

This may indicate that motivational training take place as a required and regular part of practice, in order to have a carry over effect in competition. On the other hand, there was a permanent and marked decrease in fear of the social consequences of failure. In summary, the training program did allow the subjects to put more focus on the achievement behavior (action) instead of the outcome. The authors also recommended that Marten's SCAT (used to indicate whether or not the subjects had a fear of failure) be combined with an interview or questionnaire in future fear of failure studies (Hosek & Man).

Measuring Fear of Failure

Fear of failure has also been measured using the Hostile Press scoring system (Birney et al., 1969; Martens, 1982; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). The Hostile Press can take many forms (Birney et al.). The two main forms of the Hostile Press utilize a brief story or a picture to be interpreted by subjects. Birney et al. outlined questions that subjects are often asked to answer when interpreting a story or a picture:

- (a) What is happening? Who are the people?
- (b) What has led up to the situation?
- (c) What is being thought? What is wanted?
- (d) What will happen? What will be done?

The subject then creates a story or scenario based on his or her own feelings of what happened to the person in the presented story or picture, why it happened, and what will come of the situation. The scorer counts how many times the subject makes high or low

achievement references to legitimate demands (i.e., certain situations created by the subject). For example, the subject can make references to: achievement, failure, authority aggression, justice, reprimand, arrest and power, catastrophe, hostile personality analysis, rejection, shock, undefined tragedy, hunger, impending death, or vague loneliness. Any or all of these references can be included in the subject's interpretation of the picture or brief story. The interpretations likely indicate how the subject is currently feeling, as well as their perceived fear of failure.

Using the Hostile Press, McClelland et al. (1953) utilized 50 eighth grade males and females in their assessment of the effects of failure. First, the experimental and control groups were given a math test prior to being given the Hostile Press. The control group was not given the results of the math test while the experimental group was given results of failure. Part two of the experiment involved the subjects writing stories about the pictures that were presented in the Hostile Press. They were given 10 pictures and only 20 seconds to write a story regarding what they perceived to be happening in the pictures. They were asked to answer the aforementioned four questions that went with each picture. The hypothesis was that the experience of failure (i.e., on the math test) would produce greater fear of failure and blame on the Hostile Press. The results indicated that the math failure did increase the occurrence of blame and fear of failure on the Hostile Press for the experimental group as compared to the control group. The results were significant as the authors concluded that recent experience with failure increased the subjects' feelings of fear of failure (McClelland et al.).

The SCAT has been used to assess competitive A-trait measures (e.g., how prone an athlete is to perceive a competitive situation as threatening), and has been shown to be

positively related to sport-specific (state anxiety/situational) dispositions of fear of failure (e.g., competitive situations perceived as threatening because failure may occur) (Birney et al., 1969; Hosek & Man, 1984; Martens, 1982). The SCAT is a self-administered inventory that is used to assess anxiety in competitive situations and has been used in studies to identify if an athlete has a fear of failure (Martens). The inventory consists of 10 anxiety statements and five spurious statements to reduce response bias. The five spurious items are not scored. The SCAT is presented to subjects as the Illinois Competition Questionnaire (Martens). Each subject is asked to answer the questions based on how they generally feel in a competitive situation. The responses on the inventory are rated on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (hardly ever) to 3 (often). To score the questionnaire 10 anxiety statements are summed using the following scoring key:

1 = Hardly ever

2 = Sometimes

3 = Often

The scoring for two questions is reversed and uses the following key:

1 = Often

2 = Sometimes

3 = Hardly ever

The possible range for a SCAT score is between 10 and 30. A score of ten corresponds to a subject who has very low anxiety during competition and/or little to no fear of failure. A score of thirty corresponds to a subject that has high anxiety and/or a high fear of failure (Martens, 1982).

As stated, the SCAT measures competitive A-trait and has been shown to be related to the sport-specific dispositions of fear of failure, self-confidence, and sensitization to internal feelings of threat (Martens, 1982). Martens suggested the SCAT to be a stronger predictor of fear of failure in sport-specific situations than other nonsport-specific personality measures. High competitive A-trait individuals perceive greater threat than low competitive A-trait individuals. The sources of threat that a high competitive A-trait individual may feel are generally based on his or her past experiences with success and failures. Some examples of threat may be fear of failure, fear of evaluation, ego threat, outcome uncertainty, perceived importance of sport, and negative outcome certainty (Martens).

The SCAT is also a good predictor of A-state. A-state refers to situational feelings such as apprehension, tension, and worry in a specific situation. High A-trait individuals possess a higher A-state than lower A-trait individuals during competitive situations, especially if there is a greater chance for failure than success (Martens, 1982). In summary, the level of a person's A-trait and A-state anxieties can be directly related to their fear of failure. If an athlete is prone to being anxious and then thrown into a highly competitive game, his or her anxiety is likely to increase and result in a fear of failure.

Weinberg (1978) utilized the SCAT to separate high competitive A-trait and low competitive A-trait baseball players. Subjects were asked to perform an overhand-throwing task and were given success or failure feedback based on their performance. The subjects were then asked to perform the overhand-throwing task for the post-test and again were given feedback based on their performance. The results indicated that low competitive A-trait subjects performed best after receiving failure feedback. High

competitive A-trait subjects performed best after receiving success feedback. In comparison, the low competitive A-trait subjects did better than did the high competitive A-trait subjects following failure feedback (Weinberg). This may indicate that "failing" for a highly competitive A-trait individual is so devastating that he or she continues to focus on failure, and therefore fails again. On the other hand, after experiencing a success, a highly competitive individual again performs successfully. Therefore, it may be that a highly competitive A-trait individual will develop a fear of failure after experiencing failure a first time. Obviously, he or she does not want failure to occur again (Weinberg).

Hosek and Man (1984) utilized the SCAT to identify fear of failure and determine how to reduce fear of failure in athletes. Their findings suggested that an interview and/or an additional questionnaire could provide more validity and reliability to the measure and identification of fear of failure individuals. An additional questionnaire given to subjects could allow them to more openly explain the reasons or causes of their perceived anxieties. This way, the experimenter might better assess and know perceived threats to individuals (Hosek & Man).

Finally, more research is needed, especially in developing sub-scales to measure different underlying components of competitive anxiety, such as fear of failure or fear of evaluation. Such components would be best researched using a combination of interviewing and questionnaire methodologies (Hosek & Man, 1984; Martens, 1982). This is to say that a greater emphasis be placed on alternative methodologies, such as qualitative assessments to facilitate predictions about the components of competitive anxiety, in particular, fear of failure.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description of the perceptions of male and female Division III intercollegiate athletes who experienced fear of failure. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to assess the unique perceptions and experiences of these athletes. This chapter discusses the (a) justification and rationale for the qualitative design, (b) selection of subjects, (c) instrumentation, and (d) management and analysis of data.

Justification and Rationale for the Qualitative Design

This study was not designed to document numerical levels of fear of failure, nor to gather evidence in support of a particular hypothesis. Rather, it was hoped that this research would provide further understanding of relevant issues regarding the perceptions that impact an athlete's perceived fear of failure. The interest was in not only what the athletes felt, but also why they felt it. For this reason a qualitative approach, using basic interviewing and observational techniques, was employed to uncover feelings and perceptions that would not likely emerge in various survey methodologies. In particular, the researcher employed the techniques of phenomenology to gather in-depth information about a relatively small number of subjects.

The use of a phenomenological design allowed the researcher to describe the subjects' experiences and feelings through their behaviors. The researcher not only listened to the subjects during the interview, but also was allowed to witness the subjects and see first hand how they related or reacted to different stimuli during practices and

games. In short, phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience.

Selection of Subjects

Athletes

The SCAT (Appendix A) and an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix B) were given to 15 males and 16 females on the men's and women's Ithaca College basketball teams. Four athletes ($\underline{n} = 2$ males, $\underline{n} = 2$ females) (see Appendix C for biographical data) were then purposely selected and interviewed based on their perceived anxiety scores in competitive situations (from the SCAT), as well as the answers they provided on the questionnaire. In an in-depth interview, the selected athletes were asked a series of questions that focused on their perceptions of their abilities and/or feelings concerning fear of failure. The interview questions followed the interview guide outlined in Appendix D. Only after fully understanding the nature of the study, the SCAT testing, the open-ended questionnaire, and the interviewing format, were all 31 original subjects asked to sign the informed consent form (Appendix E).

Coaches

In an attempt to triangulate the data, two additional informants were interviewed. Two coaches ($n = 2$), the head coaches from the men's and women's basketball teams, were interviewed and asked about their thoughts concerning a specific subject's perceived abilities and fears. Specifically, the selected coaches were asked a series of questions that focused on their perceptions about the athlete's fear of failure. The

questions followed the interview guide as outlined in Appendix F. Only after fully understanding the nature of the study and the interviewing format, was each coach asked to sign the informed consent form (Appendix G).

Instrumentation

Interviews

An in-depth, semi-structured interview was conducted with each subject. The interviews took place at the end of the respective men's and women's basketball seasons so that players and coaches could reflect on the entire season. The athletes were allowed to elaborate on their failures and successes throughout their sport season. Coaches were allowed to elaborate on their perceptions of the athletes' feelings throughout the season.

Athletes. Athletes were asked questions about how they perceived their abilities in competitive situations, as well as questions based on their perceptions about their sources of fear and their feelings of fear of failure (see Appendix D for a listing of all interview questions). The athletes were also asked about the impact of their perceived perceptions of fear of failure on their performances.

In addition, the athletes were informed as to the importance of their honesty in answering the interview guide questions. They were also informed that the primary source of information was to come from them. The primary researcher was seeking information from each athlete about their experiences in sport and how they felt about their abilities in competitive situations.

Coaches. Coaches' interviews were conducted to triangulate the data. The coaches were asked questions pertaining to their perceptions about each athlete's

performances and/or emotional states. The coaches were asked questions (see Appendix F for a listing of all interview questions) based on their experiences with the athletes. The questions focused on the sources of fear that were associated with the athlete's fear of failure. The coaches were also asked what they perceived to be the factors that impacted, contributed to, or influenced the perceived feelings of fear of failure in each athlete.

Observations

In an attempt to further triangulate the data and strengthen the study, the primary researcher kept a journal of at least one practice and/or game per week, for 10 different weeks, for each athlete. Observations included how the athletes reacted to certain situations and how others reacted to them. A second journal included the conversations between players, coaches, and peers. In particular, the primary researcher was listening for comments about or from the selected athletes about their performance and/or perceived emotional states. The observations were used to help answer the questions: What are the sources of fear of failure as perceived by the athletes and what perceptions impact fear of failure? Combined with the athletes' and coaches' data, information from these observational field notes were used to refine and delineate the sources and causes of fear of failure.

SCAT and Questionnaire

The SCAT and open-ended questions were used solely to select the athletes with the greatest fear of failure. The SCAT followed the format found in Appendix A. The SCAT is a series of questions designed to assess an athlete's anxiety in sport situations. High levels of anxiety have been shown to correspond to high fear of failure in athletes

(Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990). Authors of the SCAT have reported reliability scores as .85 and validity scores as .61. The open-ended questionnaire given to each athlete, with the SCAT, followed the format found in Appendix B, and assessed how each athlete perceived his or her abilities in competitive situations.

Management and Analysis of Data

Each athlete's oral description of their fear of failure experiences, as well as the coach's descriptions of each athlete's fear of failure, and all observational field note data were analyzed using phenomenological methodologies. The final data included four athlete interviews, two coach interviews, and field notes from 10 weeks of observations.

All data were coded. Coding allows the primary researcher to represent the essential meanings of many different statements, and at the same time, the significant differences between the statements and cases within the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to coding as "unitizing", which means the raw data is transformed into units. A code is a general term representing that which organizes the data. Coding allows the primary researcher to organize the ideas given by the subjects. Following the coding of sentences and paragraphs, data analysis takes the form of categorizing items of data across different analytical steps. The result is a combination of categories with generalized meanings (Ashworth, Goirgi, & Koning, 1986). These categories allow the primary researcher to compare and contrast specific similarities and differences between subjects. The categories are then transformed into clustered themes. Themes are made up of common categories that allow the primary researcher to organize the interview

material in relation to the specific research question. In this case, the themes were integrated into a description of the fear of failure experience.

The success of a phenomenological design is contingent upon piecing together the data that has emerged, with minimal or no personal biases. The primary researcher must follow the rudiments of qualitative inquiry, appropriately selecting research questions, carrying out the interview process, and properly analyzing the data.

Qualitative inquiry entails the analysis of words instead of numbers. All findings must be well organized and managed according to order of importance, while minimizing personal biases. While trying to organize and make sense of the verbal data, the primary researcher was careful not to place her own biases into the data. In summary, the primary researcher had a sufficient understanding of the phenomenon under study, yet remained open to the perceptions of the subjects. This was especially true when the primary researcher attempted to apply meaning to the statements. She acknowledged who she was, her individuality as a researcher, her own personal interests and values, and how these qualities might have affected the data. Therefore, she was critically subjective, empathized with the subjects, yet was aware of her own prejudices. She bracketed her biases so that the perceived experiences were that of the subjects and not of her own. By bracketing, the primary researcher suspended or put aside what she already knew about fear of failure. This allowed the researcher to "see" fear of failure as described by the subjects. After bracketing, the researcher began the process of intuiting. Intuiting is the process of understanding the fear of failure phenomenon. While intuiting, the researcher focused all her attention on the subjects' perceived feelings. The primary researcher attempted to put aside her preconceived ideas in order to focus on each subject's

perceived fear of failure. In doing so, a greater understanding of fear of failure, from the athletes' perspectives, was attained.

Data Collection and Recording Procedures

Once an athlete met the criteria for inclusion in the study (i.e., the subject scored above 21 on the SCAT) and he or she agreed to participate in the study, an appointment time for that subject's interview was finalized. In all cases, the interviews were completed in an on-campus office location. The interview guide was created specifically for this study by devising questions of potential relevance to the overall research question. A series of relevant questions pertaining to how each athlete felt in certain competitive basketball situations was asked. The interview guide effectively created a semi-structured conversation and did not confine the athlete from taking potentially relevant tangents. Each interview lasted between 25 and 65 minutes and all were tape-recorded.

Analytical Steps

Data analysis followed the four steps outlined below.

1. Interview tapes were transcribed word for word.
2. The researcher broke down the transcribed data for each interview question, for both the athlete and the coach, into significant statements (i.e., statements significant to answering the overall research question). Observational data were incorporated to strengthen each statement (e.g., athlete 2 stated during her interview that she was not very confident as an individual, but it depends, "if I go out and do something good I will have a lot more confidence, than if I go out and create a turnover." This was confirmed

while observing athlete 2, for when she missed a shot or created a turnover she put her head down. Whereas, if she made a shot she smiled and jumped around). (See Appendices H-K for all athlete and coach significant statements).

3. The significant statements were then grouped together with similar significant statements (provided by both the coach and the athlete) to create meaning units (see Appendix L).

4. Meaning units from the combined significant statements were reviewed across participants to determine common themes (see Appendix M). These common themes, as they are reported in the results, provide the answer to the overall research question: What perceptions impact perceived fear of failure?

Establishing Trustworthiness

In an attempt to maintain methodological rigor, Professor Shelley of the Exercise and Sport Sciences Department at Ithaca College oversaw the study. As the study auditor, Professor Shelley examined the analytical steps of this research project and guided the primary researcher toward the final results. Professor Shelley verified the final analysis so that the results could stand up to the main conclusions and explanations drawn from the sample participants. Finally, the auditor pointed out common areas where the researcher may have allowed her own biases to interfere, including premature closure, unexplored field note data, logical inferences, or alternative explanations.

There was also a peer debriefer. The role of the peer debriefer entailed holding the primary researcher accountable for her data management and interpretations. Miss Erika Backus, a master's candidate at Ithaca College in the Graduate Program in Exercise

and Sport Sciences, carried out the role of the peer debriefer. Miss Backus explored the investigator's biases in interpreting, managing, and reporting the data collected. The peer debriefer read all the original data to get an understanding of each subject's perceptions. During the process of coding and creating themes, the peer debriefer checked the primary researcher's work to make sure there were no biases (based on the primary researcher's past experiences and knowledge) confounding the data. The peer debriefer regularly challenged the primary researcher as to her reasons for and the logic behind the analytical processes and decisions that were made. The peer debriefer was constantly going back to the original data and challenging the primary researcher to consider each subject's point of view.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study was designed to examine the perceptions that impact an athlete's perceived fear of failure. The findings were based on interviews with four Division III basketball players, their coaches, and practice and game observations made by the primary researcher. Using interview transcripts, the researcher isolated each participant's answers to the interview questions. These answers were then broken down into significant statements. Significant statements were grouped together to form meaning units. Meaning units were then reviewed across participants to determine common themes. The common themes (i.e., in answer to the outlined research question) follow.

Research Question: What perceptions impact perceived fear of failure?

Theme #1: Expectations from their coaches and the athletes' families caused the athletes to feel tremendous pressure.

Three of the four athletes indicated that expectations from their family and coach caused them to fear that they might not live up to those expectations and let someone down. For example, athlete 1 stated,

Coach tells me I need to be consistent and this is an expectation. I try but sometimes it [the ball] just doesn't fall and nobody [family/teammates/coach] knows what that is like. I feel like I let people down totally. My dad said once if I did not do something right I would never get the chance to play at college. He said, I was not college material. It [expectations/pressure] just really messes me up.

Athlete 1 also stated:

In a situation where I am pressured [because of high expectations] I feel I have to go out and do more than they are asking. I always try to do more than I can do.

Athlete 2 also noted feelings of added pressure:

When coach has an expectation of me I feel pressure because I know I have a certain role to fill. It makes me start to doubt myself. I would think I am going to fail. I don't want to let my teammates or my coach down.

Observational field notes indicated that when the head coach would tell athletes 1 and 2 that she was depending on them to perform, the athletes would get an overwhelming look of fear on their faces. Their eyes would become wide and they would start to nod their head in anticipation and rub their hands together. Their breathing also appeared more labored.

Athlete 3 noted that outside expectations upset him because he places enough expectations on himself.

I get pissed at my parents when they place expectations on me. They know how I am. I always want to jump higher, I always want to do better. I don't need outside expectations because I know more than anyone else what I want and what I have to do to achieve my goals.

The coach of athlete 3 agreed that athlete 3 placed high expectations on himself when he stated:

I told him nice going one day in practice and he remarked, I am getting tired of playing so poorly. He really wasn't playing that poorly, but he is very hard on himself. He has high expectations and a low self-esteem.

Athlete 4 noted that he liked it when the coach had a high expectation of him. It made him feel as though he had confidence in him to achieve his goals. He did note that he felt the pressure from expectations, but felt relatively good about that pressure. He knew there were going to be setbacks and that was fine with him.

Observational notes indicated that both athletes 3 and 4 began jumping around and nodding their heads in anticipation when the coach would let them know that they

were going into the game. Athlete 3 often paced the floors and talked to himself aloud about how he had to perform well, especially when his father was present at the game.

Theme #2: Athletes stated that getting compliments and pleasing coaches, family, and self was very important.

All of the athletes interviewed said they enjoyed pleasing others and reaping the benefits, such as compliments for their efforts. For example, the coach of athlete 1 stated,

She has always just wanted to please people and pleasing people means positive reinforcement. She has a fear of failure and low self-concept because she is just so afraid of not pleasing people that it just interferes with what she is able to do.

Likewise, athlete 1 stated,

I think that anyone is afraid of failing. I mean, especially when somebody is expecting something of you. I think I have always been afraid of failure because relating back to my father I think the way he brought me up was, like, you know you have to be the best and if you are not you have failed. The feeling is like when you break curfew or something at home and you fear punishment. It is just like if you fail you are waiting for a punishment to happen and you don't want it to happen because that is not a good thing. I just don't want to do anything wrong because I don't want to affect someone else in a bad way.

Athlete 2 described her feelings as,

I think coach plays a big part in what I think of myself. She can say one thing and that will be it. I will think I am the worst player in the world and at the same time she can give me a compliment and it will bring my self-confidence up. I just want to make coach and the rest of the team happy.

Observational field notes indicated that athletes 1 and 2 clapped their hands and jumped up and down when they made a basket during a game. If the coach yelled out a compliment, they would both smile and appeared to have more energy and enthusiasm.

The need for compliments and pleasing others was also made apparent when athlete 4 stated,

I think it is good to have assistant coaches because they give you a little boost in self-confidence. Sometimes we get off the court after doing something wrong and they will give you a pat on the back and there is no way coach would ever come over and say good job or good effort. Reinforcements are good.

Athlete 3 was in constant search for reinforcements because he felt he was a perfectionist. In short, athlete 3 stated:

If you make a mistake coach lets you know it. I always try not to make a mistake. It is degrading to me personally when I get yelled at. It impacts me being yelled at in front of everyone else. If I were to have a good practice I would feel good about myself internally, especially if people [coach and teammates] were to compliment me.

Observational field notes indicated athlete 3 also clapped his hands and jumped around after making a basket during a game. Athlete 3 added a little bounce in his step and also appeared to have more energy if his coach praised him during a game.

Theme #3: Athletes attributed their successes and/or failures to external factors, such as luck, injury, circumstance, or they blamed others for their own failures.

The athletes seemed to have hid behind excuses for their failures; directing the fault at someone else or blaming it on an injury or being a victim of circumstances. When asked how he felt when he did not get into a game, athlete 4, an underclassman, blamed people for his perceived failures by stating,

Right now I know my role on the team (sophomore). A senior, I think, deserves or has earned the right to be able to play. If there was a 50/50 choice, I would hope the coach would choose a senior over a sophomore or underclassmen. Typically I do not get too angry. I just play for fun right now. Other guys are expected to perform and I am not.

Similarly, athlete 1 blamed her failure on circumstances beyond her control when she stated,

I do not play to the ability I am capable of. I look at my past season and I see how well I did. I am not doing as well for some reason this year. I always try to do the right thing, and I think I do way too much and cause

too much strain on my body. I just wish there was not a traumatic effect on my self-confidence. I wish I was the same person as far as who I am [as a person] but playing as well as I did last year.

The coach of athlete 1 stated,

She has a very low pain tolerance. She uses injury to escape failure. She is afraid to take on a challenge when she knows she may fail so she finds a reason to fail and validates her failure through injury. She is also always directing fault at her teammates for failure.

This attributing behavior was noted in the researcher field observation notes.

Athlete 1 hopped around on one foot as if she were in pain when she made a mistake or missed a crucial shot during the game. She would also point her finger and yell at other players when she would do something wrong. Similarly, athlete 4 would sit on the bench and shrug his shoulders, telling people the reason he was not playing and the team was losing was because of the coach.

On the other hand athletes 2 and 3 took full responsibility for their failures and attributed their success to luck. Athlete 2 said,

I think I play differently if the ball goes in instead of popping out. I think it all just depends if I get lucky or not.

When asked if she felt her success was based on luck or skill, athlete 2 answered, "Probably skill, I don't know, a bit of both I guess."

Likewise, athlete 3 attributed his success to luck when he stated,

Playing against the starting center is a hand full. He is just really good. Trying to get a shot over him is impossible. If I make a shot over him I feel awesome, but then I think he was slacking off, and I got lucky or something. During practice there is always something wrong with what I do. I always make excuses for my achievements and failures. I mean if I do it I am successful sometimes. Why can't I be all the time? I attribute that to the starter having an off day. That is why I had an on day.

The coach of athlete 3 stated that athlete 3 attributed his failures to external factors by blaming his father and his role on the team:

His father is a military man, the physical therapy department is inundated with calls from his dad about how things are going and what he needs to be doing. If he [athlete 3] took some of these things on himself it might force him to grow up a little bit and accept some responsibilities instead of displacing them. I think the biggest thing that is holding him back is that he is satisfied with being a role player and a back up.

Observational notes indicated that, to some degree, both athletes 2 and 3 attributed athletic success to luck. If they did something better than someone else they would get excited and clap but they then would shrug their shoulders almost as if to say, "it must have been luck."

Theme #4: All athletes suffered from low self-confidence, self-esteem, and/or perfectionism.

When asked the question if they were confident while playing in competitive situations all of the athletes were quick to say, "not really." Athlete 3 stated,

Everyone knows [myself included] I am never happy with how I am. I always want to jump higher. I always want to perform better. I've grown up being a perfectionist.

Athlete 3 even stated that when he played in a highly competitive situation he tried to pretend he was playing against a "crappy person". He did not believe he could beat a good player so he had to imagine himself playing against a "crappy player".

The coach of athlete 3 also stated that this athlete was suffering from a fear of failure but he added that athlete 3 also had a low self-concept when he remarked,

I think everyday in practice you could see some frustrations on his part for failures that were brought on by a lack of confidence in himself. I told him nice going one day in practice and he remarked, "I am getting tired of playing so poorly." He really wasn't playing poorly but he is just so hard on himself. I think on a cognitive level he is a pretty good player, but at an

emotional level he is not sure if he believes it. He is worried about being unsuccessful. It is a constant.

Athlete 1 said she was only confident when something good happened. Her self-concept was based solely on whether or not she was having a good game. She stated, "I am bothered by how I feel. I am not confident in the way that I am playing so I don't think I am helping the team and I start to get down on myself."

Similarly, athlete 2 answered,

I very rarely say — if anybody asks me how I played — I will never say good. I am much harder on myself than the coach is. I don't have a lot of confidence in myself and I am not sure why. I think I am an overachiever. I always want to succeed and I do academically, but in sports it is harder for me. I can't achieve in sport. I don't have as much control over the outcome. If I don't succeed I feel bad. I wish I could do better. I am my own worse critic. I have a fear of failure. I always want to succeed and I worry about it all the time. I think I am an overachiever or a perfectionist or something.

Likewise the coach of athlete 2 stated,

When she learns a new skill, she doesn't like to practice the skill in front of anyone because she is self-conscious and she doesn't want to fail. It is like the times where she covers her face after she shoots an air ball, almost to say it wasn't me and don't stare at me. She has a fear of failure or a fear of not being perfect because not being perfect is failure to her, not trying is also failure to her. She doesn't accept failure and will continue to try to better herself because of failure.

Athlete 4 was a little different. He seemed to hide behind excuses. When asked how he would describe his feelings about his performance in a competitive situation, he stated simply, "I am not a highlight film." He simply answered that he had a fear of failure [or low self-confidence] when he did not live up to his or others expectations. The coach of athlete 4 stated,

I think right now there might be a ceiling on what he thinks he is capable of. We need him to get rid of that ceiling and have him rise above it. He is

at his level of failure because he never gets to play and he is very self-conscious of that.

This low self-esteem behavior was noted in the field observations for all four athletes. They seemed to let all their failures and/or successes dictate how they were going to feel about themselves. After a loss they would all mope around. If asked how they were doing they would reply "terrible". If basketball was going well everything seem to go well. If they were to get compliments and win then everything thing seemed right in the world. On the other hand if they were to lose and the coach yelled at them it seemed as if their self-worth went down the drain. They would hang their head and pout.

In summary, all four athletes, their coaches, and daily researcher observations indicated that the athletes all suffered from a perceived fear of failure. Each athlete developed their perceived fear of failure in their own unique way. Some had an overwhelming urge to please others which caused them to feel great amounts of pressure to succeed. When they did not succeed they protected their self-confidence by attributing their failure to external factors such as injury, luck or they blamed others for their own failures. Others placed an enormous amount of pressure on themselves to achieve perfection, and when perfection could not be reached they developed a low self-confidence and attributed their failure to internal factors such as lack of athletic skill. Although each athlete had a different background, all emerged with commonly defined fear of failure themes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide information regarding athletes' perceived fear of failure. Although previous research on fear of failure has been based primarily on quantitative research, the present study utilized qualitative methodologies. Common themes emerged that were related to specific athlete feelings, expectations, self-confidence, attributions, and fear of failure. This chapter discusses the common themes that emerged from the study and how these themes relate to the overall research question and the existing literature.

Research Question: What perceptions impact perceived fear of failure?

The following common themes provide an answer to this question.

1. Expectations from their coaches and the athletes' families caused the athletes to feel tremendous pressure.
2. Athletes stated that getting compliments and pleasing coaches, family, and self was very important.
3. Athletes attributed their successes and/or failures to external factors, such as luck, injury, circumstance, or they blamed others for their own failures.
4. All athletes suffered from low self-confidence, self esteem, and/or perfectionism.

While this study did not document quantitative levels of fear of failure, each athlete was asked to describe his or her perceived feelings about fear of failure. All of the athletes indicated they did have a fear of failure but the reasons for fear of failure

were somewhat unique to the individual. Still, the aforementioned common themes emerged.

Speculation would lead to the conclusion that both male and female collegiate athletes can experience a fear of failure. In this study, gender was not a determining factor in who experienced a fear of failure and who experienced a fear of success, which was also indicated by Lirgg and Feltz (1989). Lirgg and Feltz noted that greater female participation in sport and physical activity may help to counter the female's fear of success and maybe turn the female athlete toward a fear of failure. Participants 1 and 2 were both female athletes and both of them admitted to having a fear of failure. Although speculative in nature, this study indicates that a fear of failure can emerge as strongly in some women as it does in men. According to this study, male and female athletes can both fear failure and success for similar reasons.

The role the athlete played on the team did not seem to be a determining factor in who experienced a fear of failure either. The athletes varied from starters to first off the bench to hardly ever getting a chance to play, however, they all seemed to develop some degree of fear of failure. Rather than boosting confidence, for some athletes being a starter seemed to add more pressure which seemed to increase the probability of developing fear of failure. Similarly, the players that came off the bench or rarely played seemed to question their abilities and therefore, when the chance to play came, they feared making a mistake that would place them back on the bench.

Low Self-Confidence, Low Self-Esteem, and Low Self-Consciousness

Athletes stated that getting compliments and pleasing coaches, family, and self was very important.

McAuley et al. (1983) stated that athletes who are rewarded for a successful performance and punished for an unsuccessful performance often internalize the reinforcements and are guided by these reinforcements throughout their lives. Likewise, Greenberg et al. (1982) found the motive to protect one's self-image to be so strong that most students with a fear of failure created a self-serving bias to compensate for unsuccessful outcomes. Students were afraid if they were seen failing they would become failures in the public eye (Greenberg et al.). Similarly, athlete 2 described her self-image when she stated:

I think coach plays a big part in what I think of myself. She can say one thing and that will be it, I will think I am the worst player in the world and at the same time she can give me a compliment and it will bring me up. I just want to make coach and the rest of the team happy.

Getting compliments from the coach and teammates was also very important to athletes 3 and 4. Athlete 4 stated, "Reinforcements are good." Athlete 3 said, "If I were to have a good practice I would feel good about myself internally, especially if people were to compliment me."

All the athletes in this study were positively affected when they received compliments from others. It gave them a sense of worth or reward. Each athlete remembered when he or she was last rewarded for being successful and it gave their confidence a boost. Similarly, McAuley et al. (1983) stated that attributing success to personal skills enhances self-confidence, especially when reinforced with rewards or compliments. This happens because athletes remember that they were rewarded when they were last successful and want to achieve that reward again (McAuley et al.).

Family also played an important role in the development of each athlete's self-esteem. Athlete 1 stated:

I feel like I let people down totally, and my dad used to say if I did not do something right I would never get the chance to play at college. He said I was not college material.

Similarly, Pavio (1965) suggested that self-conscious individuals crave compliments because he believed they rarely received them from family members. He stated that self-conscious individuals usually came from families where parents had low standards, evaluated their children unfavorably, punished children frequently, and rarely rewarded their children for success.

All athletes suffered from low self-confidence, self-esteem, and/or perfectionism.

All the athletes attributed their low self-confidence to a fear of negative evaluation by others or oneself in a social situation. Albury (1980) indicated that low self-confidence, feelings of worthlessness, and anxiety to be antecedents to developing a fear failure or fear of not living up to one's standards.

Athlete 1 said she was only confident when something good happened. She stated, "I am bothered by how I feel, like as far as I am not confident in the way that I am playing so I don't think I am helping the team, and I start to get down on myself."

Similarly, athlete 2 stated that she too did not have a lot of confidence in herself. When asked, "How confident are you in the ability of the team to succeed?" She answered, "Very confident. I never think I do good as an individual, but as a team we are successful." Pavio (1965) suggested that this is a form of self-consciousness because of her fear of negative evaluation, not only by others but by one's self. The coach of athlete 2 supported this by adding,

When she learned a new skill, she doesn't like to practice it in front of anyone because she is self-conscious and she doesn't want to fail. It is like the times where she covers her face after she shoots an air ball, almost to say it wasn't me and don't stare at me.

Athlete 3 and his coach both gave similar statements of low self-confidence.

Athlete 3 stated, "I am never happy with how I am." His coach agreed by stating, "I think everyday in practice you could see some frustration on his part for failures that were brought on by a lack of confidence in himself." Passer (1983) indicated that males, when placed in a situation where failure was probable, feared being viewed as less of a man.

Atkinson's (1966) model suggested that fear of failure involves the anticipation of fear of failure combined with the motive to avoid failure. Contrary to Atkinson's model, both athletes 2 and 3 expressed that they felt they were perfectionistic. They excelled academically and showed weaknesses athletically and were not sure why. Both athletes went into the athletic realm with feelings of inferiority but hoped to overcome those feelings. Their fear of failure seemed to drive them to overcome failure. Living up to one's own expectations was also very difficult for athletes 2 and 3. Athlete 2 stated,

I always want to succeed and I do academically, but in sports it is harder for me. I can't do it [achieve in sport]. I don't have as much control over it [sports]. I am my own worst critic.

Similarly, athlete 4 said,

I get pissed at my parents when they place expectations on me. They know how I am. I always want to jump higher, I always want to do better. I don't need outside expectations because I know more than anyone else what I want and what I have to do to achieve my goals.

Attributions

Athletes attributed their success and/or failures to external factors, such as luck, injury, circumstance, or they blamed others for their own failure.

To protect their self-confidence, the athletes in this study attributed their successes and failures to external factors. Athletes 2 and 4 attributed success to controllable factors and failures to uncontrollable factors. Frieze (1976) stated that individuals would attribute success to effort and ability and failure to luck and/or task difficulty. Success is often attributed to controllable factors, while failure is attributed to uncontrollable factors. This way, success is perceived as a direct result of one's efforts, while failure is not (Frieze, 1976). Regarding attributions for not playing, athlete 4 (a sophomore) stated,

Right now I know my role on the team. A senior, I think deserves or has earned the right to be able to play. If there was a 50/50 choice, I would hope the coach would choose a senior over a sophomore or underclassmen. Typically I do not get too angry. Other guys are expected to perform and I am not.

It seems as though athlete 4 was attributing his failure (not playing) to being an underclassman. He didn't want to take responsibility for his failure so he justified it by saying it was due to his circumstances at that time. Likewise, the coach of athlete 1 said,

She has a very low pain tolerance. She uses injury to escape failure. She is afraid to take on a challenge when she knows she may fail so she finds a reason to fail and validates her failure through injury. She is also always directing fault at her teammates for failure.

It also appeared as though athlete 1 may have attributed her failure to injury.

Athlete 1 may have avoided personal failure by blaming others or using external, uncontrollable factors instead of accepting responsibility for her failure. Taylor and Doria

(1981) also stated that when a self-serving bias is present, an athlete will blame other group members or attribute failure to external uncontrollable factors rather than accept personal failure. This allows the athletes a chance to "save face" and accept failure through no fault of their own (Forsyth & Schlenker, 1977; Gill, 1980; Taylor & Doria; Weary, 1979).

Results indicated that athletes 1 and 4 attributed failure to external factors whereas success was attributed to internal factors such as skill or effort. Rejeski and Lowe (1980) stated that individuals assume more personal responsibility for success than failure. Specifically, people are more likely to attribute success to internal causes such as ability and effort. Failure, on the other hand, is more likely to be attributed to external factors such as task difficulty and luck (Weiner, 1979). Contrary to athletes 1 and 4, athletes 2 and 3 attributed their successes to external factors such as luck and their failures to internal factors such as lack of ability. It may be that athletes 1 and 4 created self-serving biases by taking credit for good outcomes and denying responsibility for bad outcomes in order to protect their self-confidence. For example, athlete 1 blamed her poor performance on an injury to "save face." In contrast, athletes 2 and 3 created group serving biases and accepted personal failure to protect the good of the group or team. Taylor & Doria (1981) suggested that athletes would sometimes take personal responsibility for group failures. Group failures are easier for the athlete to accept because the risk for being singled out as the cause of failure is not as strong. These authors suggested that team sports allow fear of failure athletes to accept failure, but still not be the sole reason for failure (Taylor & Doria).

Regarding not taking credit for his successes and promoting a group serving bias, athlete 3 stated,

If I make a shot over the starting center I feel awesome, but then I think he was slacking off, and I got lucky or something. During practice there is always something wrong with what I do. I always make excuses for my achievements and failures. I mean if I am successful sometimes why can't I be all the time. I attribute that to the starter having an off day. That is why I had an on day.

When asked the question, "Is your success from luck or skill?", athlete 2 answered, "Probably skill. I don't know, a bit of both, I guess."

Fear of Failure

Expectations from their coaches and the athletes' families caused the athletes to feel tremendous pressure.

The athletes felt if they did not live up to others expectations, feelings of failure overcame them. These findings are similar to the results found by Elliot and Church (1997). These authors reported individuals to be oriented toward the avoidance of failure for fear that a negative outcome would follow failure (e.g., not living up to expectations).

Athlete 1 stated,

Coach tells me I need to be consistent and this is an expectation. I try but sometimes it [the ball] just doesn't fall and nobody [teammates/coach] knows what that is like. I feel like I let people down totally. My dad said once if I did not do something right I would never get the chance to play at college. He said, I was not college material. It [expectations/pressure] just really messes me up.

Athlete 1 likely suffers from an extroverted fear of failure because she feared social devaluation. She was constantly worried about what others thought of her. She saw herself through the eyes of others. Athlete 2 also stated, "I don't want to let my teammates or my coach down." Birney et al. (1969) stated that social devaluation (e.g.,

not living up to others' expectations) could be a secondary punishment for athletes.

Individuals differ in their degree of developing these fears based on their past experiences, but they can be more debilitating than the failure itself.

All themes help explain fear of failure. All four athletes concluded their interview by stating that they believed that they had a fear of failure. The question is, what type of fear of failure did each athlete possess? It is likely that athletes 1 and 4 possessed an extroverted fear of failure. They feared social devaluation. Corbin (1970) stated extroverted fear of failure exists when an individual would fear negative evaluation from others or nonattainment of a prescribed standard. Athlete 4 simply stated he had a fear of failure when he did not live up to certain expectations. Likewise athlete 1 maintained,

I think that anyone is afraid of failing. I mean especially when somebody is expecting something of you. I think I have always been afraid of failure because relating back to my father I think the way he brought me up was like you know you have to be the best and if you are not you have failed. It is like when you break your curfew or something at home and you fear punishment. It is just like if you fail you are waiting for a punishment to happen and you don't want it because that is not a good thing. I just don't want to do anything wrong because I don't want to affect someone in a bad way.

The coach of athlete 1 concurred, "She is just so afraid not to please people that it just interferes with what she is able to do."

In contrast, athletes 2 and 3 exhibited an introverted fear of failure. They feared devaluation of self-confidence or self-esteem. Corbin (1970) stated that an individual with an introverted fear of failure would fear not living up to personal goals or one's "ideal self". The basketball team allowed these athletes to accept team failure which allowed them to be sheltered from personal failure. Athlete 2 expressed,

I have a fear of failure. I always want to succeed and I worry about it all the time. I think I am an overachiever or a perfectionist or something.

Athlete 3 also declared, "I have a fear of failure, I hate to admit it but I've grown up being a perfectionist." Even though they too wanted to please others, it was likely a secondary need. It seemed as though their primary need was to build up their own self-confidence. They both wanted to be the best they could be for themselves. Pleasing others appeared to let them know that "yes" they were doing well internally.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that fear of failure is a complex issue. The athletes in this study have developed their fear of failure throughout their lives. Four common themes have emerged to help explain fear of failure. The perceptions that impacted the athletes' perceived fear of failure were expectations from the coach, family or self, the need for compliments and pleasing others, attributing success or failures to external factors, and low self-confidence. All the athletes demonstrated these perceptions and all seem to believe that these perceptions contributed to their perceived fear of failure. Yet their fear of failure is still unique. They all differ in age, gender, and background. Fear of failure is not prejudice to gender as once thought (Lirgg & Feltz 1989). Two of the athletes (i.e., athletes 2 and 3) were driven by the fear to help them succeed, whereas the other two (i.e., athletes 1 and 4) appeared to be "frozen" by their fear of failure. In this study, two types of fear of failure existed as stated by Corbin (1980). Introverted fear of failure is that which is controlled by the individual. Introverted fear of failure seems to have inspired some athletes to succeed (i.e., athletes 2 and 3). While extroverted fear of failure is that which is controlled by others, leaving some athletes as victims without any control (i.e., athletes 1 and 4).

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the perceptions of four NCAA Division III varsity basketball players. The purpose of this study was to examine athlete perceptions impacting perceived fear of failure. This chapter provides a discussion of the recommendations for future research on fear of failure. Along with these recommendations are conclusions and a summary of the common perceptions that impacted the athletes' perceived fear of failure.

Summary

Division III athletes were assessed for fear of failure using the SCAT and a short open-ended questionnaire. Four athletes were purposively selected and interviewed. The athlete's coach was also interviewed to help answer the following research question: What perceptions impact perceived fear of failure? Athletes in this study felt pressure when outside expectations were placed on them. That pressure was compounded by the need to please others. If unsuccessful, the athletes attributed their failures and/or success to external factors. All athletes suffered from a low self-confidence as a result of a fear of failing. As a result, pressure, the need for compliments, attributing failure to external factors, and a low self-esteem influenced a perceived fear of failure. Finally, both males and females admitted to having a fear of failure. Four common themes were found across athletes and discussed in relation to the existing literature.

Conclusions

Fear of failure does not appear to be gender specific. As stated, both males and females indicated they not only have a fear of failure, but also share similar predispositions to fear of failure.

Four overriding themes emerged to help clarify athletes' predispositions to developing a fear of failure.

1. Expectations from their coaches and the athletes' families caused the athletes to feel tremendous pressure.
2. Athletes stated that getting compliments and pleasing coaches, family, and self was very important.
3. Athletes attributed their successes and/or failures to external factors, such as luck, injury, circumstance, or they blamed others for their own failures.
4. All athletes suffered from low self-confidence, self-esteem, and/or perfectionism.

Defining fear of failure is a difficult task without including aspects from the aforementioned four common themes. Fear of failure has appeared to become an umbrella term that likely encompasses low self-confidence and various attributions — one likely impacting the other. A low self-confident athlete fails to live up to expectations and therefore, attributes failure to external factors to protect his or her self-esteem. A low self-confident athlete often needs to receive compliments from others to feel good about him or herself and attributes that good outcome to internal factors such as skill. Fear of failure does not simply appear. It would seem, based on this study, that it develops over time and across circumstances. One theme likely leads to another. Not necessarily in a certain order, but each common theme most likely impacts every other

common theme.

Fear of failure can greatly impact a person's life. The question remains, "How can one help eliminate fear of failure?" Not only from an athlete's life but also any person outside of sport. "Does one even want to eliminate fear of failure?" "Is fear of failure a bad thing?" "Does it hold one back or does it make one work harder?" These are all very important questions that are yet to be answered.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations should be considered when further investigating fear of failure. The first recommendation involves replication of the present study. Interviews with Division III student-athletes should be conducted as they were for this study. Such future research should include more participants ($n > 4$) that represent a cross section of the athletic population, encompassing many sports and levels (i.e., high school, Division I, II, professional, etc.). Sampling a larger cross section of the athletic population might make it possible to apply and generalize results to a greater number of athletes. Selecting athletes from many levels of sport participation might also enhance the understanding of how fear of failure develops over time and across levels of competition. Assessing the attitudes of student-athletes who are on scholarship (e.g., Division I), with non-scholarship athletes (i.e., Division III) might also prove fruitful. Comparing athletes from team sports with those of individual sports may also provide a greater understanding of fear of failure.

Lirgg and Feltz (1989) suggested male athletes to be more prone to develop a fear of failure and female athletes to be more prone to develop a fear of success. However, the present study has indicated that both male and female athletes can develop a fear of

failure. Therefore, it is recommended that this investigation be replicated across genders, with greater numbers of both males and females. Such an emphasis may provide a greater understanding of the influence of gender on fear of failure.

Further investigations targeting athletes' perceptions, sport anxiety, and perfectionism may also provide valuable information on fear of failure. Future research in this area may include focusing on defining specific perceptions surrounding sport anxieties and how they relate to developing a fear of failure. Also, this study might be replicated focusing on athletes who are perfectionistic. More research is needed to further investigate the influence of perfectionism on fear of failure.

Finally, future studies examining fear of failure should include both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Future research combining both methods of inquiry may prove to be most rigorous.

APPENDIX A

SCAT

Using SCAT and SCAT NORMS

Illinois Competition Questionnaire

Form A

Directions: Below are some statements about how persons feel when they compete in sports and games. Read each statement and decide if you **HARDLY EVER**, or **SOMETIMES**, or **OFTEN** feel this way when you compete in sports and games. If your choice is **HARDLY EVER**, blacken the circle labeled A, if your choice is **SOMETIMES**, blacken the circle labeled B, and if your choice is **OFTEN**, blacken the circle labeled C. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement. Remember to choose the word that describes how you usually feel when competing in sports and games.

	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Often
1. Competing against others is socially enjoyable.	A O	B O	C O
2. Before I compete I feel uneasy.	A O	B O	C O
3. Before I compete I worry about not performing well.	A O	B O	C O
4. I am a good sport when I compete.	A O	B O	C O
5. When I compete I worry about making mistakes.	A O	B O	C O
6. Before I compete I am calm.	A O	B O	C O
7. Setting a goal is important when competing.	A O	B O	C O
8. Before I compete I get a queasy feeling in my stomach.	A O	B O	C O

9. Just before I compete I notice my heart beats

faster than usual.

A O

B O

C O

10. I like to compete in games that demand

A O

B O

C O

considerable physical energy.

11. Before I compete I feel relaxed.

A O

B O

C O

12. Before I compete I am nervous.

A O

B O

C O

13. Team sports are more exciting than individual sports.

A O

B O

C O

14. I get nervous wanting to start the game.

A O

B O

C O

15. Before I compete I usually get uptight.

A O

B O

C O

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire Given to Athletes with the SCAT

1. What do you think about prior to a basketball performance?

Explain any fears or worries that you may have prior to a basketball game.

Explain any fears or worries that you may have during a basketball game.

Explain any fears or worries that you may have after a basketball game.

2. Describe what goes through your mind when you think about losing a basketball game.
3. How do you feel when faced with a challenging task in basketball (a new task or some task you find difficult)? How does this relate to your own fears about playing/competing in basketball?
4. Describe any situations in basketball where you might be afraid to fail? Be specific.
5. How do you feel when "others" place expectations on you and your performance (give an example)? How do you feel if you do not live up to those expectations?

APPENDIX C

Biographical Information

Athlete #1

Age: 19

Gender: Female

Sport: Basketball

Position: Forward

Role on the team: Starter

Year in school: Sophomore

Athlete #2

Age: 19

Gender: Female

Sport: Basketball

Position: Forward

Role on the team: Third person off the bench (i.e., role player)

Year in school: Sophomore

Athlete #3

Age: 18

Gender: Male

Sport: Basketball

Position: Forward

Role on the team: Bench (i.e., never played unless the team had a considerable lead)

Year in school: Freshman

Athlete #4

Age: 20

Gender: Male

Sport: Basketball

Position: Guard

Role on the team: Second or third off the bench (i.e., role player)

Year in school: Sophomore

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide Questions for Athletes

1. Describe a typical day of practice.
2. Overall, how would you describe your feelings about your performance in a competitive situation in the past 10 weeks?
3. Overall, how do you feel about your performance in a competitive situation?
4. How confident are you in your ability to succeed as an individual on this team?
5. How confident are you in the ability of this team to succeed?
6. How do you feel when others have high expectations of you?
7. How do you feel if you do not live up to those expectations?
8. How do you feel prior to a highly competitive situation?
9. How do your feelings effect you physically, emotionally (do you get depressed or excited), and cognitively (do you dwell on it)?
10. How do you perceive your ability to succeed?
11. Is there anything that you would like to share concerning your feelings about different sporting situations that we have not covered in this interview?
12. If you had to categorize yourself, would you choose,
a) low self-concept, b) fear of failure, c) fear of success, or d) other

APPENDIX E

Athlete Informed Consent

The Assessment of fear of failure in Division III Collegiate Athletes.

1. Purpose of the Study

To provide an in-depth description of the fear of failure experience as perceived by Division III collegiate athletes.

2. Benefits of the Study

The benefits for participation in this study include a general understanding of the fear of failure phenomenon. It is hoped that this research will offer others a more descriptive understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes associated with fear of failure.

3. What You Will Be Asked To Do

Complete a Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT).

Answer five questions (a questionnaire) about your performance in different sport situations. Four athletes will be chosen, along with their coaches, and given a semi-structured interview concerning the athlete's performances in different athletic environments. Interviews will be recorded on a tape recorder and transcribed following the interview. Athletes will also be observed by the primary researcher during numerous practice and competitive sessions.

4. What You Can Expect to Happen as a Result of Your Participation in this Study

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that will be placed on the subjects. This study does not present any psychological, physical or social risks to any of the subjects.

5. If You Would Like More Information About The Study

*Please contact Cristen R. Ladouceur at 1-(607)-257-8055.

6. Withdrawal from the Study

Any subject is free to withdraw at any time without penalty and to omit answers on the questionnaire and interview that they feel uncomfortable answering.

7. How the Data will be Maintained in Confidence

Names will not be mentioned or published in the final project.

I have read the above and I understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older. I give my permission to have the interview sessions taped with the primary researcher.

Print or Type Name

Signature of Participant/Date

APPENDIX F

Interview Guide Questions for Coaches

1. Describe a typical day at practice, a game, or school for (name of athlete) since the beginning of this season.
2. From a coaching perspective how would you describe the effects of competition on (name of athlete)?
3. Based on what you have witnessed or heard, what are (name of athlete's) greatest concerns as he/she participates in highly competitive situations?
4. How do you think (name of athlete) feels about him/herself, concerning his or her perceived competence in highly competitive situations?
5. In what ways have you perceived (name of athlete) feelings about his or her performance in competitive situations to have influenced his/her day to day practice and competition? Life?
6. What do you think (athlete name) greatest concerns are when he or she is out on the court during a game?
7. If you had to categorize (name of athlete) feelings, what would they be?
 - a) low self-concept, b) fear of failure, c) fear of success, or d) other

APPENDIX G

Coach Informed Consent

The Assessment of fear of failure in Division III Collegiate Athletes.

1. Purpose of the Study

To provide an in-depth description of the fear of failure experience as perceived by Division III collegiate athletes.

2. Benefits of the Study

The benefits for participation in this study include a general understanding of the fear of failure phenomenon. It is hoped that this research will offer others a more descriptive understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes associated with fear of failure.

3. What You Will Be Asked To Do

Coaches will be given a semi-structured interview focusing on two of their athletes. The coaches will be asked about the athlete's performance in different athletic environments. Interviews will be taped and transcribed following each interview. Athletes will also be observed by the primary researcher during numerous practice and competitive sessions.

4. What You Can Expect to Happen as a Result of Your Participation in this Study

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that will be placed on the subjects.

This study does not present any psychological, physical or social risks to any of the subjects.

5. If You Would Like More Information About The Study

*Please contact Cristen R. Ladouceur at 1-(607)-257-8055.

6. Withdrawal from the Study

Any subject is free to withdraw at any time without penalty and to omit answers that they feel uncomfortable answering.

7. How the Data will be Maintained in Confidence

Names will not be mentioned or published in the final project.

I have read the above and I understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older. I give my permission to have the interview sessions taped with the primary researcher.

Print or Type Name

Signature of Participant/Date

APPENDIX H

Significant Statements - Athlete 1 and Coach

Athlete 1

Question #1. Describe a typical day of practice.

1. I go out and work hard, I try to anyway.
2. If I am not doing something right I can tell and I start to get frustrated and as practice goes on depending on how I am doing things, if my shots are going in, I feel good. If they are not I tend to worry and it effects my practice.

Question #2. Overall, how would you describe your feelings about your performance in a competitive situation in the past 10 weeks?

3. I do not play to the ability I am capable of.
4. I look at my past season and I see how well I did and I am not doing as well for some reason this year.
5. I am not the person I was last year.
6. I always try and do stuff, and I think I do way too much sometimes.
7. I just wish there was not a traumatic effect, I wish I was the same person as far as who I am now but playing as well as I did last year.

Question #3. Overall, how do you feel about your performance in a competitive situation?

8. I am excited, I love competition.
9. I always worry how, I hope this is a good day.
10. I hope I play alright.

11. I hope I don't mess up anything.

12. I always worry about if something goes wrong and it totally causes us to lose or causes a crucial turning point in a game.

13. Sometimes I look back and say maybe I did not work as hard as I could.

14. I feel is I am not having a good day I am just thankful it is not a game day.

Because I don't want to cause any problems.

Question #4. How confident are you in your ability to succeed as an individual on this team?

15. I am bothered by how I feel like as far as I am not confident in the way that I am playing so I don't think I am helping the team, and I start to get like down on myself.

16. I have confidence in me, but it comes with something good almost all the time.

17. Sometimes I just worry I don't think I am playing well on the floor.

18. I hope coach takes me out because I don't want to cause a loss.

19. I want to win no matter what the consequences.

Question #5. How confident are you in the ability of this team to succeed?

20. I have total confidence in our team.

Question #6. How do you feel when others have high expectations of you?

21. Pressure, very pressured.

22. In a situation where I am pressured I feel I have to go out and do more than they are asking and I always try to do more than I can do.

23. Coach tells me I need to be consistent and that is an expectation, I try but it is just it doesn't fall and nobody knows what that is like.

Question #7. How do you feel if you do not live up to those expectations?

24. I feel like I let people down totally, and my dad used to say if I did not do something right I would never get the chance to play at college. He said, I was not college material.

25. It just really messes me up.

Question #8. How do you feel prior to a highly competitive situation?

26. I always feel confident that the team can beat them, but it is hard when you know you can beat them but you don't know if everyone else thinks you can. That is what affects you.

Question #9. How do your feelings effect you physically, emotionally (do you get depressed or excited), and cognitively (do you dwell on it)?

27. I feel tired feelings, butterflies, it is a great feeling because you are excited to go out there.

Question #10. How do you perceive your ability to succeed?

28. I worry about not succeeding because I think a lot of people like coaches and my father always expected you to go out and have a good game every game. There are going to be days where you are just not.

29. I hope I do well and I try to do well but sometimes it is just not going to happen.

Question #11. Is there anything that you would like to share concerning your feelings about different sporting situations that we have not covered in this interview?

Question #12. If you had to categorize yourself would you choose low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

30. Fear of failure.

31. I think that anyone is afraid of failing, I mean especially when somebody is expecting something of you.

32. I think I have always been afraid of fear of failure because relating back to my father I think the way he brought me up was like you know you have to be the best and if your are not you have failed.

33. I mean it is like when you break a curfew or something at home and you fear punishment. It is just like if you fail you are waiting for a punishment to happen and you don't want it to because that is not a good thing.

34. I don't want to do anything wrong because I don't want to effect someone else in a bad way.

Coach/Athlete 1

Question #1. Describe a typical day at practice, a game, or school for (name of athlete) since the beginning of this season.

35. Very moody, very inconsistent, she can be very high or very low, never seemed to be in the middle.

36. She finds other factors to validate her errors and mistakes.

37. When things were going well things continued to go well. If things started out poorly thing continued to go poorly. There is no effort on her part to make every day a good day.

38. She is not in control, other people are. She sees herself through other people's eyes.

39. She works very hard for the person that is validating her at the time.

40. Very low pain tolerance, she uses injury to escape failure.

41. She is afraid to take on a challenge when she knows she may fail, so she finds a reason to fail and validates her failure through injury.

42. She is always directing fault.

43. She is not consistent, you can't rely on her.

Question #2. From a coaching perspective how would you describe the effects of competition on (name of athlete)?

44. She is a gamer, games mean more to her than practice. She is not a drill person.

45. Practice is a whole two hours of trying to be perfect under scrutiny.

46. In practice she would get chewed out for every little thing that she does.

47. She gets more praise in a game.

48. I think she dreads practice because to her it is constant anxiety.

Question #3. Based on what you have witnessed or heard, what are (name of athlete's) greatest concerns as she participates in highly competitive situations?

49. I think when the rewards are greater she will put more on the line.

50. She is so externally motivated that during a game there is more to win.

51. I find her greatest productivity in games with lesser competition.

Question #4. How do you think (name of athlete) feels about herself, concerning her perceived competence in highly competitive situations?

52. She sees herself better than she really is, because she remembers the good times and blocks out the bad time. She thinks about the games where she had 20 points, not the games she only had 2 points.

53. She wants to be, but she doesn't want to invest the time and effort to be. It is easier for her to remember the good games.

Question #5. In what ways have you perceived (name of athlete) feelings about her performance in competitive situations to have influenced her day to day practice and competition? Life?

54. I think she knows it exists, she wants to be consistent but she can't be.

55. She has always just wanted to please people and to please people meant positive reinforcement.

Question #6. What do you think (name of athlete) greatest concerns are when she is out on the court during a game?

56. Pleasing other people, I don't think she is as worried about making mistakes as she is about getting the praise. She wants success.

Question #7. If you had to categorize (name of athlete) feelings, what would they be?

Low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

57. Low self-concept and fear of failure, because when you have a fear of failure and you fail you will develop a lower self-concept.

58. She is just so afraid not to please people that it just interferes with what she is able to do.

APPENDIX I

Significant Statements- Athlete 2 and Coach

Athlete 2

Question #1. Describe a typical day of practice.

59. I feel like I am competing against other forwards for playing time.

60. I will compare what I am doing to what so and so is doing. That is how I decide if I am having a good day or a bad day.

61. If I get a compliment or something I notice that, If she is paying more attention to somebody else or something, I want to try and figure out why.

62. I want the practice to end. If I have a bad practice the rest of my day will be bad.

Question #2. Overall how would you describe your performance in a competitive situation?

63. I have been really happy and then I will go and gave a really bad game.

64. Sometimes I will play well and then I won't get any playing time the next game. That ruins my confidence.

Question #3. Overall, how do you feel about your performance in a competitive situation?

65. I very rarely say if anybody asks me how I played, I will never say good.

66. I am much harder on myself than the coaches.

67. I don't have a lot of confidence and I really don't know why.

68. I think I am an overachiever, I always want to succeed and I do in school and everything, but in sports it is harder for me. I can't do it. I don't have as much control over it.

69. If I don't succeed I feel bad. I wish I could do better.

70. I feel good about my competitiveness, I always try hard no matter how I am feeling.

Question #4. How confident are you in your ability to succeed as an individual on this team?

71. Not very confident as an individual. But it depends if I go out there and do something good I will have a lot more confidence, than if I go out and create a turnover.

72. I think I play differently if the balls goes in instead of popping out. It just depends on luck, if the first thing I do is good or bad.

73. Probably skill, I don't know, a bit of both.

Question #5. How confident are you in the ability of this team to succeed?

74. Very confident in the team, I never think I do good as an individual, but as a team we are successful.

Question #6. How do you feel when others have high expectations of you?

75. I feel good, because the coach must have confidence in me.

76. At the same time I feel pressure because I know I have a certain role to fill. Then I start to doubt myself.

77. Last year I was a head case. I was just so nervous before every game. I could not even listen to the coach. I would think I am going to fail.

Question #7. How do you feel if you do not live up to those expectations?

78. I feel bad as if I failed. Like I let teammates down and the coach too.

79. I think I don't want to play. I don't want to make the same mistake.

80. Sometimes it holds me back. I keep thinking the next day it will get better and it doesn't and that holds me back.

Question #8. How do you feel prior to a highly competitive situation?

81. I won't be nervous because I won't expect to play that much.

Question #9. How do your feelings effect you physically, emotionally (do you get depressed or excited), and cognitively (do you dwell on it)?

82. Physically - Maybe I will feel more tired.

83. Emotionally- I get depressed. Usually I think about it so much that if basketball is going good then I feel like everything is going good and I am happy about it. But if it is going bad I feel like everything else is bad, even if it isn't.

84. It [basketball] is a really big part of what I am doing. It dictates how everything else is going and how I am feeling about everything else.

Question #10. How do you perceive your ability to succeed?

85. I think I can succeed.

Question #11. Is there anything that you would like to share concerning your feelings about different sporting situations that we have not covered in this interview?

86. I think coach plays a big part in what I think of myself. She can say one thing and that will be it, I will just think that I am the worst player and at the same time she can give me a compliment and it will bring me up.

87. I am also my own worse critic. If I make a mistake, I start to doubt myself.

Question #12. If you had to categorize yourself would you choose low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

88. I have a fear of failure. I always want to succeed and I worry about it all the time.

Coach/Athlete 2

Question #1. Describe a typical day at practice, a game, or school for (name of athlete) since the beginning of this season.

89. When she learns a new skill she doesn't like to practice it in front of anyone because she is self-conscious and she doesn't want to fail. Instead she will work on it on her own and bring it back polished.

90. If you are at the basket when she is working on it, she can't cope, she can't cope with failure.

91. Everything gets into her head and she can't work with the skill, if you turn your back and take a peek later she is doing a lot better with it. She doesn't want people to see her when it is not perfect.

92. She is a 4.0 student and is used to success.

93. She will drill and drill hard, she wants to succeed and she works to succeed.

94. She doesn't like to be singled out and yelled at because it makes her feel like a fool and she doesn't want to be seen any less than perfect.

Question #2. From a coaching perspective how would you describe the effects of competition on (name of athlete)?

95. She is a passive person. The more she really tries for something and asserts herself towards something the greater the fall is if she doesn't achieve it.

96. She tries to become assertive, she tries to do everything you ask, because she accepts responsibility. She is self-directed. She genuinely wants to be successful.

Question #3. Based on what you have witnessed or heard, what are (name of athlete's) greatest concerns as she participates in highly competitive situations?

97. She is putting in the effort; she is doing what we are asking her to do and doesn't get the pay off, so I think that crushed her a little bit. But normally she comes back harder.

98. She never really gives up. Again success feeds her confidence if she is not at the level we want her at she will work harder to achieve that level.

Question #4. How do you think (name of athlete) feels about herself, concerning her perceived competence in highly competitive situations?

99. I think she understands that on the basketball court she has a weakness.

Question #5. In what ways have you perceived (name of athlete) feelings about her performance in competitive situations to have influenced her day to day practice and competition? Life?

100. I think it is a fear of not being perfect with her. If she throws up an air ball, she would cover her face out of embarrassment, for her there is nothing less than perfection.

Question #6. What do you think (athlete name) greatest concerns are when she is out on the court during a game?

101. It is like the times where she covers her face after an accident. Almost to say it wasn't me and don't stare me.

Question #7. If you had to categorize (name of athlete) feelings what would they be? Low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

102. Fear of not being perfect, because not being perfect is failure to her, not trying is failure to her. Fear of failure, she doesn't accept failure and will continue to try to better herself because of it.

APPENDIX J

Significant Statements- Athlete 3 and Coach

Athlete 3

Question #1. Describe a typical day of practice.

103. Coach, if you make a mistake, he lets you know it. I always try not to make a mistake and it is degrading to me personally when I get yelled at. It impacts me being yelled at in front of everyone else.

104. It makes me feel like I failed because he is right, whatever he says is always basically whenever I screw up.

105. I get pissed at myself more than anything in the classroom too. If I miss one question out of 15, I get really pissed off. I am like a perfectionist.

Question #2. Overall, how would you describe your feelings about your performance in a competitive situation in the past 10 weeks?

106. If I were to have a good practice I would feel good about myself internally, especially if people were to compliment me if I had a good practice.

Question #3. Overall, how do you feel about your performance in a competitive situation?

107. I feel like I should be doing better.

Question #4. How confident are you in your ability to succeed as an individual on this team?

108. I strive to be my optimal best. If I can't do that I just get mad. I try to improve on mistakes. Sometimes if I have already screwed up once, it is in my mind not to do it again. I don't want to be yelled at twice in one game or practice.

109. I have dealt with this my whole life.

110. My parents know how I am. Everyone knows I am never happy with how I am.

111. I always want to jump higher, I always want to do better.

112. I am harder on myself than anyone else.

113. I have expectations from coaches and my parents that I have the ability, but I have those expectations too.

114 My dream is to play college basketball and I want to live up to that as best I can.

115. I am my own worse enemy.

116. Playing against the starting center is a handful. He is just really, really good. Trying to get a shot over him is like impossible and if I make a shot over him I feel awesome, but then I think he was slacking off, and I got lucky or something.

117 . During practice there is always something wrong with what I do. I always make excuses for my achievements and failures.

118. I mean if I do it sometimes (am successful) how come I can't do it all the time? I attribute that to the starter having an off day. That is why I had an on day.

119. Varsity games, yeah, because I only get in the last few minutes so the anxiety goes up over the roof. I try to do my best and just worry about doing as much as I can in two minutes

120. Just the fact that when I am in a game it goes on the record and people are watching and all that so there is a difference.

121. If my parents or my girlfriend are going to be there or something, I'm a little more nervous. I want to try to perform extra special for them. It means a lot when they come and I want to show them what I can do, what I have been working my ass off all season for.

Question #5. How confident are you in the ability of this team to succeed?

122. I get nervous because the others on the team may be a little relaxed, or if they are joking around. Anyone can beat anyone in a game of basketball.

123. The point of basketball is to have fun, but there is also the competition aspect of it. You want to have fun while you win. Winning is fun.

Question #6. How do you feel when others have high expectations of you?

124. Increased adrenaline, nervousness, but I already put a lot of pressure on myself so no one can really add more pressure.

125. I get pissed at them because my parents remind me about not to go out if I tell them I have an exam next week. I tell them to shut up. I don't need outside expectations because I know more than anyone else what I want and what I have to do to achieve my goals.

Question #7. How do you feel if you do not live up to those expectations?

126. I get down for a period of 24 hours, but then I shake it off and try again.

Question #8. How do you feel prior to a highly competitive situation?

127. I try to block out any expectations people have of me. I try to go out there and pretend I am playing against a crappy person. Just go out there and destroy them.

Question #9. How do your feelings effect you physically, emotionally (do you get depressed or excited), and cognitively (do you dwell on it)?

128. I think I have already answered that.

Question #10. How do you perceive your ability to succeed?

129. I can succeed.

Question #11. Is there anything that you would like to share concerning your feelings about different sporting situations that we have not covered in this interview?

Question #12. If you had to categorize yourself would you choose low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

130. Fear of failure, I hate to admit it but I mean I don't like to fail. I've grown up being a perfectionist.

Coach/Athlete 3

Question #1. Describe a typical day at practice, a game, or school for (name of athlete) since the beginning of this season.

131. He is a very diligent worker in practice.

132. I think every day in practice you could see some frustration on his part for failures that were brought on by a lack of confidence in himself.

133. His heart beats a little slow, he may be aggressive and willing to do it, but doesn't do it. He doesn't react as quickly as he could to certain situations.

134. He has paralysis by analysis. I think he thinks too much. I think if he spent less time evaluating and more time playing it would pay dividends for him because he is talented. He just spends too much time evaluating his game and how he compares to other people.

135. He practically reveres our starting center, it is okay to respect your teammate but to hold them on that plateau, I think is going to hold you back.

136. His father is a military man, the physical therapy department is inundated with calls from his dad about how things are going and what he needs to be doing, and if he took some of these things on himself it might force him to grow up a little bit and accept some responsibilities instead of displacing them. I think the biggest thing that is holding him back is that he is satisfied with being a role player and a back up.

137. He has a real problem with his self-confidence or lack thereof.

138. I told him nice going one day in practice and he remarked, I am getting tired of playing so poorly. He really wasn't playing that poorly, but he is very hard on himself.

139. He is hard on himself for whatever reason, I saw a little bit of it with his sister, I had her in PT class as well and she had similar personalities, high expectations and low self-esteem.

140. Many players come out of high school and they have a high opinion of themselves and then they run smack dab in the middle of culture shock when they get to

college basketball. The intensity level and mental intensity and the physicalness of the play is so far beyond what they are used to.

Question #2. From a coaching perspective how would you describe the effects of competition on (name of athlete)?

141. I think he tries hard, but there is a difference between a player trying hard and a player who competes.

142. I think he is the type of kid that if the coach says to him you need to do this, this and this to get better, he would do this, this and this and he won't figure it out for himself. He has to have the inner drive and the self-motivation.

Question #3. Based on what you have witnessed or heard, what are (name of athlete's) greatest concerns as he participates in highly competitive situations?

143. I think he feels he needs to improve a substantial amount.

144. I think on a cognitive level he is a pretty good player, but at an emotional level he is not sure if he believes it. I think he is at odds with those two things because he is smart enough to know that for me to make the IC varsity I must be doing something. But then he looks at the starting center and says I am never going to be as good as he is.

145. He will do anything you ask him to do if you told him he would be a better player if he lowered his head and ran into the wall, he probably would do it.

Question #4. How do you think he feels about himself, concerning his perceived competence in highly competitive situations?

146. I think one of the things he worries about the most is that when he goes in there he will make an immediate mistake. If we put him in for the first half of the game,

he is concerned about making a bad mistake and being jerked out of the game right away and being embarrassed.

147. I think he is concerned because he hasn't had that high level of success before. I think the greatest attribute any athlete can have is confidence.

148. I think his biggest fear going into a game is what doubts can I use.

149. One of our guys gave him a great pass for an open lay up in a game. He caught the ball and then fumbled the lay up. He was bummed out because he blew the other guy's assist not because he blew his lay up.

Question #5. In what ways have you perceived (name of athlete) feelings about his performance in competitive situations to have influenced his day to day practice and competitions? Life?

150. He is a warrior, he doesn't allow himself to respect himself.

Question #6. What do you think (athlete name) his greatest concerns are when he is out on the court during a game?

151. I think the anxiety level rises in the games when he gets in there. I can also say in practice he is always worried about being unsuccessful. It is a constant.

Question #7. If you had to categorize (name of athlete) feelings, what would they be? Low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

152. I think a combination of the fear of failure and low self-concept. I think one first leads to the other. He just needs to work towards his potential and stop worrying or he will never overcome those feelings of low self-concept and fear of failure.

APPENDIX K

Significant Statements- Athlete 4 and Coach

Athlete 4

Question #1. Describe a typical day of practice.

153. Towards the beginning of the year I enjoy basketball but then I don't enjoy the second semester as much.

154. Things start to build up, it is not the teammates, if it weren't the kids on the team I would not be playing here. I enjoy basketball for fun, I get fed up with the paid coaches. Coach is getting old and doesn't relate well to us. He oversteps his boundaries some times.

Question #2. Overall how would you describe your feeling about your performance in a competitive situation in the past 10 weeks?

155. I was disappointed we didn't make the NCAA tournament, for the amount of talent we have, I think we wasted it. I don't think we often played to our capabilities, I think that is a reflection of the coaches.

Question #3. Overall, how do you feel about your performance in a competitive situation?

156. I was given a chance, I am not a highlight film.

Question #4. How confident are you in your ability to succeed as an individual on this team?

157. I just play to have fun. Other guys are expected to perform and I am not. I play for fun and I think that is better, because I can enjoy myself.

Question #5. How confident are you in the ability of the team to succeed?

158. I know the team can succeed.

159. Right now I know my role on the team. A senior, I think deserves or earned the right to be able to play. If there was a 50 -50 choice I would hope the coach would choose a senior over a sophomore or underclassmen. Typically I did not get too angry.

Question #6. How do you feel when others have high expectations of you?

160. Good, you feel you are confident that you can reach your goal. You set a goal for yourself or someone else sets a goal for you, so you can accomplish it. Obviously there are going to be setbacks.

Question #7. How do you feel if you do not live up to those expectations?

161. Sure you have to feel pressure.

162. I can't stand to play in an empty gym. This year sucked when playing at home there wasn't a crowd of people. I play for the crowd. I think it is more fun performing for a crowd.

Question #8. How do you feel prior to a highly competitive situation?

163. I can't eat the day of a game even if I know I am not going to play. I get butterflies, in my stomach, and cold sweats. You know you want to SUCCEED.

Question #9. How do your feelings effect you physically, emotionally (do you get depressed or excited), and cognitively (do you dwell on it)?

164. I feel fine.

Question #10. How do you perceive your ability to succeed?

165. I will be successful as an upperclassman.

Question #11. Is there anything that you would like to share concerning your feelings about different sporting situations that we have not covered in this interview?

166. I would not be playing here if it weren't for the kids on the team. I wouldn't be here.

167. A lot of what coach says you have to take in one ear and out the other.

168. I think it is good to have assistants because they give you a little boost, sometimes we get off the court after you did something wrong and they will give you a pat on the back and there is no way coach would ever come over and say "good job" or "good effort". Reinforcements are good. I am not a person who needs a lot of pats on the back, it is nice to get but I don't get all excited or I don't get all worked up inside.

Question #12. If you had to categorize yourself, would you choose, low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

169. I guess I would choose fear of failure, if I had expectations of myself and I did not succeed. I don't tell people everything they need to know, or I tell them what they think they need to know, nothing more.

Coach/Athlete 4

Question #1. Describe a typical day of practice, a game, or school for (name of athlete) since the beginning of this season.

170. One good thing about him is given the opportunity he plays very well. He just plays. I can see the anxiety in the pre-game for him but I think it immediately evaporates when he comes into the game. His instincts take over.

171. He doesn't think about who is playing against him. He just plays.

172. My concern about him in practice is that sometimes he can be slow, his reaction time. I would explain a situation and he would ask the most basic question and you look at him and say I just explained that in detail and the answer is so obvious and he wouldn't get it. Learning disability? His reaction time is slow because he is slow mentally.

173. Sometimes I wonder where his head is. I will stop in the middle of practice and look at him just to see if he is spaced out or not.

Question #2. From a coaching perspective how would you describe the effects of competition on (name of athlete)?

174. He thinks to himself, even though I have been on this bench for a while this is a shot I can make. I can do it. It is like he doesn't have anything to lose.

Question #3. Based on what you have witnessed, or heard, what are (name of athlete's) greatest concerns as he participates in highly competitive situations?

175. I made the comment in practice the other day, he was playing against a starter, and I said if you beat him on a regular basis in practice, you play instead of him. I don't think he believed me. I felt like challenging him. Change our minds.

Question #4. How do you think (name of athlete) feels about himself concerning his perceived competence in highly competitive situations?

176. I don't think he sets any goals, you have to be goal-oriented. I am going to start on this basketball team. I am going to be a threat.

177. He needs to be a bastard on the court.

Question #5. In what ways have you perceived (name of athlete) feelings about his performance in competitive situations to have influenced his day to day practice, and competition? Life?

178. His dad died when he was two, so he grew up without a dad. Dads can be intimidating, he needed that. There are certain things a mother cannot give her son.

Question #6. What do you think (athlete name) greatest concerns are when he is out on the court during a game?

179. I think he thinking, I hope I do not make a mistake.

Question #7. If you had to categorize (name of athlete) feelings, what would they be? Low self-concept, fear of failure, fear of success, or other?

180. I think right now there might be a ceiling on what he thinks his is capable of. We need to get rid of that ceiling and have him rise above it. Nothing to lose. He is at his level of failure. He is barely playing a game he loves. He is at the bottom and only plays because he loves his teammates.

APPENDIX L

Meaning Units-Athletes 1 - 4 and Coaches

Athlete 1/Coach

1. She feels she is working hard but can not live up to past accomplishments.
(1,3,4,7)
2. She tries very hard to live up to the expectations of her coach and father.
(2,14,21,22,23,24,26,28,32)
3. She validates her errors and mistakes through injury and directing fault to others. (36,40,41,44)
4. She has a low self-concept. (11,15,16,38,45,47,56)
5. She has a fear of failure. (12,28,30,31,32,34,54,57)
6. She is constantly trying to please others to get praise.
(38,39,46,47,49,55,56,58)

Athlete 2/Coach

7. Compares herself to others. (58,60)
8. She likes to please others to get praise. (61,84 86)
9. She is a perfectionist, 4.0 student. (66,68,87,88,89)
10. She has a low self-concept about her basketball ability because she has no control over it and it shows her weakness.
(59,60,61,63,64,66,67,69,73,80,83,90,92,99,100,102)
11. Attributes success in basketball to luck. (72,73)

12. Worried she is going to let team and coach down. Doesn't like to be singled out and yelled at. (75,77,78,79,94)

13. Fear of failure because she always wants to succeed.
(68,85,88,90,91,92,96,100,101,102)

Athlete 3/Coach

14. Feels degraded when coach yells at him during practice. (103,104,108)

15. He is a perfectionist. (105,130)

16. He enjoys pleasing others and getting compliments.(106)

17. He has high expectations for himself and does not like it when his parents or coach place higher expectations upon him. (121,124,125,127)

18. He attributes success to luck or someone else having a bad day.
(116,117,118,144)

19. He has a low self-concept, and compares himself to others. Settled for making the team and being a role player. (116,117,118,127,132,134,135,137,144,146,150,152)

20. He has a fear of failure. (130,152)

Athlete 4/Coach

21. He attributes the team failure to the coaches. (154,155).

22. He has a low self-concept at this point of his basketball career because he is not living up to expectations. (155,156)

23. He likes to receive praise from the coaching staff. (160,168)

24. He attributes his lack of playing time to the fact that he is a sophomore.
(157,159)

25. He feels he is at a level of failure (i.e., not playing all the time) because he only plays once in a while so when he does play he plays like he has nothing to lose.

(173,178)

APPENDIX M

Common Themes

Research Question: What perceptions impact perceived fear of failure?

1. Expectations from their coaches and the athletes' families caused the athletes to feel tremendous pressure. (2,6,12,14,16,17,22)
2. Athletes stated that getting compliments and pleasing coaches, family, and self was very important. (6,8,16,23)
3. Athletes attributed their successes and/or failures to external factors, such as luck, injury, circumstance, or they blamed others for their own failures. (1,3,11,18,21)
4. All athletes seem to be suffering from low self-confidence, self-esteem, and/or perfectionism. (4,7,9,10,11,15,18,22)

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